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DISPAUPERIZATION

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DISPAUPERIZATION

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DISPAUPERIZATION.

BY

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‘The degree of indigence and misery is exactly in proportion
to the assistance given to the poor by rates.’

ARTHUR YOUNG.

LONDON:
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1876.



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TO
THE MEMBERS
OF
THE COMMITTEE OF POOR LAW CONFERENCES

This Volume is Inscribed

IN RESPECTFUL RECOGNITION OF THEIR
EARNEST EFFORTS IN THE CAUSE
OF
DISPAUPERIZATION -

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DISPAUPERIZATION.

SECTION I.

POOR LAW HISTORY.

POVERTY must in every commonwealth be a frequent element of difficulty and danger. In all national strifes and convulsions it is either the primary cause or a powerful factor. When the mass of a people are prosperous, contentment and peace usually prevail; while in all clamours of the angry multitude the ominous voice of Poverty is the ground-note, now subdued, now breaking forth in those tones of terror which are the prelude to revolutionary violence and excess. Poverty is the natural ally of Faction, the sworn enemy of public security and order, of law and authority. 'It is ill talking between a fu' man and a fasting.' The half-starved apothecary in Shakspeare felt the force of Romeo's reminder,

The world is not for thee, nor the world's law.

There is a standing quarrel on the part of the 'Have-nots' against the 'Haves.'

If poverty be 'the teacher of arts and the dispenser of genius,'¹ the mother of industry and of useful inventions, it is no less the prompter of all specious but impracticable theories of right or benevolence with regard to the possession and distribution of wealth. To what inspiration but poverty are to be ascribed the dreams of fraternity, equalisation of possessions, socialism, and communism? The very terms are but translations of the vague and lawless wishes of discontented poverty into the language of pseudo-philanthropy and false political philosophy.

In every political community poverty is an obstinate fact, which can neither be got rid of nor ignored. Avoid the hideous monster here, and it will reappear there; attempt to suppress and crush it, as was attempted in years previous to the great French Revolution, and it rises, Antæus-like, more formidable from the earth. It is the constant shadow, an ever-present punishment, of human folly, passion, and vice. All attempts to abolish or prevent it by law have proved not merely failures, but aggravations of the evil, and productive of still greater evils. The treatment of it, like other social problems, is a problem which has recurred at various ages of the world, and is capable only of an approximate solution.

Poverty has accordingly been the great *crux* of

¹ Magister artis ingenique largitor.—*Pers.*

The words which follow, 'negatas artifex sequi voces,' are to the present point.

legislators and statesmen. Looking to the annals of the past, we find that in the Hebrew commonwealth a remedy was provided against it in the ordinance that the lot which each family had received in dividing the land of a conquered country should, if it had been alienated, return at the end of fifty years to the original possessor or his heirs. This ordinance, however, appears to have been more or less evaded by legal contrivances, of which the effect was the speedy resumption of the land by the creditor or mortgagee. Provision for the mitigation of poverty was also made by precept and exhortation to the practice of beneficence, forbearance towards debtors in their extremity, and a liberal treatment of dependants. Yet even thus the Hebrew legislator warned his countrymen that ‘the poor would never cease out of the land.’ In Hebrew history we may observe, by the way, a significant instance of the existence of poverty, and of the part which it readily plays in opposition to power. There we have the case of a divinely-designated heir to the throne compelled, for the preservation of his life, to assume an attitude of armed defence against the murderous attempts of the occupant of the throne, and speedily surrounded in his refuge by a desperate body-guard of ‘every one that was in distress, and every one that was in debt, and every one that was discontented,’¹ for whose maintenance he seems to have levied

¹ 1 Samuel xxii. 2.

a sort of 'black-mail' upon wealthier persons, like that which in modern days the needy clans of the Scottish Highlands practised upon 'the Southrons.'

In the early times of Greece a similar method obtained for the relief of poverty, according to the following account given by Thucydides: 'The Hellenes of old, and those barbarians who lived near the sea or in islands, when they had begun the practice of passing over to each other in ships, took to piracy under the conduct of their chief men, with a view to their own gain, and to the maintenance of the needy.'¹ In fact, these piratical Hellenes of old, in levying forced contributions in behalf of their poor, were, after a fashion of their own, anticipating the principle of 'compulsory relief,' on which our own Poor Laws are framed. The institutions of the great Spartan legislator, which were designed to prevent the existence of wealth, would seem at first sight calculated to prevent poverty also, by such a division of land as would secure to every head of a family a plot of ground, which was to be inalienable. This regulation, however, could not resist the tendency of human nature to buying and selling, and of property to accumulation. Practice prevailed against the law, and the property came to be chiefly vested in the hands of a few owners. At

¹ Οἱ γὰρ Ἕλληνες τὸ πάλαι καὶ τῶν βαρβάρων οἳ τε ἐν τῇ ἡπείρῳ παραθαλάσσιοι καὶ ὅσοι νήσους εἶχον, ἐπεὶ δὴ ἤρξαντο μᾶλλον περαιοῦσθαι ναυσὶν ἐπ' ἀλλήλους, ἐτράποντο πρὸς ληστείαν, ἡγουμένων ἀνδρῶν οὐ τῶν ἀδυνατωτάτων κέρδους τοῦ σφετέρου αὐτῶν ἕνεκα καὶ τοῖς ἀσθενέσι τροφῆς.—*Thuc.* Book i. ch. v.

Athens, in the days of its decline, a species of Poor Law was in force, similar in principle to our own—a kind of ‘outdoor relief,’ consisting of doles to the poorer citizens from public resources. The demoralizing effects of this practice are familiar to the readers of Demosthenes, who denounces it as the ruin of the nobler sentiments of the citizens, of their manly independence and self-respect. There the demagogue-orators, who lorded it by gratifying the poorer, and therefore the more numerous, citizens, passed laws for distributing money and food to them in idleness. ‘You are become,’ says Demosthenes to his countrymen, ‘as underlings and hangers-on, happy if these people dole out to you show-money and beeves.’ The patriotic orator goes on to speak of ‘these perquisites, which are like the diet ordered by physicians for the sick; as that neither imparts strength, nor allows the patient to die, so your allowances are not enough to be of substantial benefit, nor yet permit you to reject them and turn to something else.’¹ It may be observed, in passing, that the show-money, which formed a part of the State distributions to the pauper citizens of Athens, was given in order that they might attend the representations of the drama, which formed the great means of amusement and instruction to the people. We may remark, by the way, that a kind of parallel to this public provision for the intellectual entertainment of the Athenian people is furnished amongst ourselves

¹ Demosthenes, *Olynthiac* II., 9, 10.

by the establishment, in our large towns, of museums and free libraries for the use of the 'poor,' so called, at the expense of the ratepayers. However, another Athenian orator, Demades, scornfully ridiculing the donations of public meat, and their pitiful effect on the public spirit, compares the Athenian republic to 'an old woman, sitting at home in her slippers, and supping her broth.'

In the better days of Roman history, a peculiar institution, the relation between *patronus* and *cliens*, (patron and dependant) greatly tended to the mitigation of poverty. It was the part of the patron to give all needful assistance with his substance or otherwise to the dependant, who in his turn rendered all such service as was consistent with the sentiments and duty of a Roman citizen. As the ancient discipline declined, we find that the obligations of this relation were proportionably relaxed; and the great Satirist of the Empire laments,¹ as one sign of the degeneracy of his days, the neglect and indignity with which the 'patronus' then too commonly treated his 'clientes.' Concurrently with the decline of this beneficent institution for the succour of poverty, was introduced a degrading and demoralizing practice much resembling the outdoor relief of our own Poor Laws, the regular distribution of food-tickets to the poorer citizens by the Emperors.² This

¹ Juvenal, Satires, i. 132-134; iii. 124, 125; v.

² Nero, it appears, was especially liberal in these largesses to the populace—the taxpayers suffering.

practice was at once a symptom and a reacting cause of the debasement of the Roman people. They who were once eminent for their active and frugal virtues, became idle pensioners on public funds, an abject populace of paupers. Accordingly the Satirist could describe this once high-minded and powerful commonalty as limiting its aspirations to doles of bread, and gratuitous admission to the Circus :¹

This people now has cast away its cares ;
The giver, erewhile, of the fearful wands
Of office, legions, generals' commands,
All State preferment, now contracts its aims,
Craving but these two things, bread and the games.

No wonder that a people thus sunk in sloth and dependence became an easy prey to the fierce barbarians of the North, who came down in hungry swarms to extort 'compulsory relief' and 'settlement' from the wealthier inhabitants of the South !

In modern States we see that poverty, when it has aggregated into a mass, has often been a fertile source of difficulty to rulers, and of trouble to the community. To go no farther back in modern history, we find that an aggregation of poverty was the cause of French Jacqueries, German peasant-wars, Wat Tyler and Jack Cade insurrections, the risings of the peasantry in

¹ Juvenal, Satire x. 78-81 :—

'Effudit curas, nam qui dabat olim
Imperium, fasces, legiones, omnia, nunc se
Continet, atque duas tantum res anxius optat—
Panem et Circenses.'

Edward VI.'s reign, and last, but greatest, of the French Revolution, well termed 'great,' in which the earliest cry of the disaffected populace was '*du pain*,' while its latest revivals in 1848, and in the Commune of 1871, were both owing in great measure to the same cause. The frequent pressure of a mass of poverty in our own national history—owing to various causes, such as dearths, expensive foreign wars, the results of which always fall heavily on wages-earners, the indiscriminate almsgiving of the monasteries, and their sudden dissolution, the excessive conversion of arable into pasture lands—led, as is well known, to various legislative attempts at its diminution, down to the famous statute of the 43rd of Elizabeth, 1602, which involved for the first time in the history of legislation the astounding principle that it is in the competence of a State at all times and in any circumstances to employ at its cost all able-bodied persons, otherwise unemployed, and to support all impotent persons in need. This statute was succeeded by a series of enactments at different intervals, restraining, or more frequently extending, the application or misapplication of the afore-said principle of Elizabeth's legislative novelty. There was the remedial statute of George I. (1723), establishing the 'workhouse test,' refusal of the workhouse being made a bar against relief. This statute had the effect of diminishing pauperism by restricting the relief of it; but it was followed in 1769 by an Act which took off from its efficiency, and in 1782 by a statute,

known as Gilbert's Act, which went far towards nullifying it, by exempting the able-bodied applicants from the necessity of entering the workhouse, and by ordering the guardians 'to find them work near their own homes, and to make up out of the rates any deficiency in wages.' Then came, in the year 1796, an Act, passed in a double 'panic' of famine and revolution, ordaining that an allowance should be made to every labourer in proportion to the number of his family, whether he was employed or not. This allowance was to fluctuate with the price of flour, and each family would receive the difference between the extraordinary and the ordinary price of a quantity of flour, proportioned to the number of its inmates. This kind of policy in dealing with the most numerous class culminated in the Act of 1815, known as East's Act, which entirely abrogated the workhouse test, exempting applicants in all cases from the necessity of entering the workhouse, and empowered justices of the peace, at their discretion, to order outdoor relief in any case in which application might be made to them. The administration and operation of the state of law, thus established, quickly absorbed so large and increasing a portion of the national resources, and brought about so prevailing an amount of idleness, improvidence, turbulence, and vice, that in 1834, nineteen years from the passing of East's Act, it was found necessary to pass a large remedial measure, in order to prevent the destruction of landed property, the diver-

sion of capital from the cultivation of the land, and the utter demoralization and pauperization of the great mass of the population; to prevent, in short, as the Poor Law Commissioners of 1832, the virtual authors of that Act, themselves say, 'national ruin.' Many persons now living remember the effects produced by the working of the Poor Laws before the change made in 1834. To those whose memory cannot extend so far back, the state of things in regard to pauperism and its concomitant evils will be almost incredible, except on a perusal of the fullest and most authentic account of it which is given in the Report of the Poor Law Commission, published in that year. No quotations from this valuable document will suffice to give any adequate notion of the evils, material and moral, which the old Poor Law brought about. The volume, however, is scarce, and some statements, therefore, now to be quoted from it, may be instructive to readers of these pages. I will premise that the volume itself has far more than a mere historical interest, as showing the mischief and danger incurred through a system of relief-law to which in recent practice we have been rapidly drifting back.

One witness, then, whose evidence is given in the Report for 1834, says, with regard to the effect of the Poor Law on agriculture and the capital employed in it, that 'as the profits of agriculture have declined, and the capital of the farmer deteriorated, so has the state of tillage and the general cultivation of the land.'

A great quantity of land was, the Commissioners tell us, thrown out of cultivation through the pressure of poor-rates. In the parish of Cholesbury, in Bucks, the whole of the land, and in other parishes a great part of the land, was given up by the cultivators. At Cholesbury, all the land was offered to the assembled paupers, who refused it, saying 'they would rather continue on the old system.' In this parish, 'relief,' so far from diminishing poverty, increased it to its utmost limits, insomuch that the Rector of the parish, whose whole income had been absorbed by pauperism, relates that, 'the rates having swallowed up the rents, the parish officers threw up their books; and the poor, left without any means of maintenance, assembled,' says the Rector, 'at my door, whilst I was in bed, and applied to me for advice and food.' The same gentleman continues in his evidence: 'My income, being under 160*l.* a year, rendered my means of relief small, but I commenced supporting them by daily allowances of bread, meat, and potatoes. In the meantime, I succeeded in obtaining "a rate in aid" for 50*l.* from Drayton, an adjoining parish. . . . The present state of the parish is this: the land almost wholly abandoned (sixteen acres only, including cottage gardens, being now in cultivation); the poor thrown only upon the rates, and set to work upon the roads and gravel-pits, and paid for this unprofitable labour at the expense of another parish.' The reverend gentleman concludes his com-

munication by recommending that the whole parish should be 'exclusively allotted to able-bodied paupers.' This instance from the Report of 1834 shows not only the capacity of Poor Law relief to exhaust the property of landowners, and its potency to banish capital from the cultivation of land, but its effect also in aggravating the poverty in the supposed relief of which this property is exhausted. The case of Cholesbury is doubtless an extreme case; but an extreme case is the crucial test of a principle, and the clearest proof of its inherent tendencies.

From the same repertory of facts some further illustrations shall be given of the effect which the Poor Law system had upon landed property and upon the employment of capital in the cultivation of the land. I quote from the evidence of Mr. Majendie, an Assistant-Commissioner, given at page 65 of the Report: 'In Lenham, Kent (at the time of his visit), some of the land was out of cultivation. A large estate has been several years in the hands of the *proprietor*, and a farm of 420 acres of good land, tithe free and well situated, had just been thrown up by the tenant, the poor-rate on it amounting to 300*l.* a year.'

'In another place, a farm well situated, of average quality, was *in vain* offered at 5*s.* an acre, not from objection to the quality of the land, but because men of capital will not connect themselves with a parish in which the poor-rates would keep them in a constant state of vexation and anxiety. In Ardingley, those

farmers who have any capital left withdraw from the parish as soon as their leases expire. One of them admitted to him (Mr. Majendie) "that it was out of the power of the landlord to relieve them." Again, it is given in evidence to the Commissioners that "the owner of a farm at Granden, in Cambridgeshire, could not get a tenant even at 5s. an acre; and that Downing College, which has a property of 5,000 acres in the same county, found it impossible, notwithstanding the lowering the rents to an extreme point, to obtain men of substance for tenants. Several farms of considerable extent have changed hands twice within the last five years, from insolvency of the tenants in some cases, in others from terror at the prospect.' In the same county, one of the Assistant-Commissioners 'found that at Soham a total absorption of the value of the land in twelve or fourteen years was anticipated.' Another of the Assistant-Commissioners states, that 'at Great Shelford, in the same county, the same result was expected to take place in ten years.'

Mr. Pilkington, another Assistant-Commissioner, states that 'at Hinckley, in Leicestershire, he found the poor-rate exceeding 1*l.* an acre, and a general opinion that the day is not distant when rent must cease altogether. On visiting Wigston Magna, in the same county, in November 1832, he was informed 'that the value of property had fallen one-half since 1820, and was not saleable even at that reduction.' 'It does not appear indeed,' he adds, 'that it ought to have sold for

more than two or three years' purchase, the net rental not amounting to 4,000*l.* a year, and the poor-rate expenditure growing at the rate of 1,000*l.* increase in a single year.' And on his return to that neighbourhood, three months after, the statement made to him was 'that property in land was gone; that even the rates could not be collected without regular summons and judicial sales; and that the present system must ensure, and very shortly, the total ruin of every individual of any property in the parish.' 'We cannot wonder,' observe the Commissioners, 'after this, at the statement of an eminent solicitor at Loughborough, that it is now (1834) scarcely possible to effect a sale of property in that neighbourhood at any price.' One witness states to the Commissioners, regarding a particular parish, that, 'if some material change does not very soon take place, the time is not far distant when the whole rents will be absorbed in the poor-rates.' Another says of his parish, 'much land in the hands of proprietors wanting tenants;' another, that 'in an adjoining parish the owners of untenanted farms, who are not farmers, fear to occupy, and prefer the loss of rent to the unlimited expense in poor-rate, which would overwhelm the profits of one not perfectly experienced in farming, and the parochial concerns it involves.' Another witness on this point states, that 'in the neighbourhood of Aylesbury there were forty-two farms untenanted at Michaelmas last (1832); most of these are still in the proprietors' hands; and, on some, no acts of husbandry

have been done since, in order to avoid the payment of poor-rate. I attribute these circumstances principally to the operation of the Poor Laws.' The instances now given are but a few specimens of the effect ascribed by this Report to the Poor Laws, in depreciating landed property, and in driving away capital from the cultivation of the soil.

Some references to this Report of the Commission of 1832 shall now be made, in illustration of the influence which the Poor Laws exerted on the qualities, sentiments, and morals of the population. On the first two points, take the following statement of the Commissioners: 'Unhappily, the evidence shows that these virtues (skill, honesty, and diligence) are rapidly wearing out, but that their place is assumed by the opposite vices; and that the very labourers among whom the farmer has to live, and on whose affections as friends he ought to depend, are becoming not merely idle and ignorant and dishonest, but positively hostile; not merely unfit for his service and indifferent to his welfare, but positively hostile.' So great and extensive, according to this Report, was the deterioration of the rural population, as agricultural labourers, under the Poor Law then in force, and, as to some important particulars, still remaining in force.

Of the deterioration in point of morals induced by this system, as shown in this Report, it is difficult to write without shocking the feelings of readers. Let it suffice to say, that, through the allowances made for the

support of illegitimate children, this country attained a bad pre-eminence in the number of such offspring—that, as the Report states, a woman who had a number of illegitimate children became an object of preference in marriage through the allowances which she was receiving from the parish in respect of the several children; and that married women of this class would point out without feelings of shame which of her children were illegitimate and which were born in wedlock.¹ No man who consults the Report in question will have any doubt of the tendency of compulsory relief to destroy one of the chief safeguards of morality in this respect, by exempting the mothers of illegitimate children from the burden of maintaining them.

With regard to the general effect of these laws on the character and conduct of the population, the evidence given in this Report goes to prove the facts that such a resource in view as parish relief prevents the labourers' exertions and the young men from laying by anything for their future; that it encourages early marriages, and thus induces pauperism in the next generation; that it is inimical to moral purity; and that it 'leads to the consumption of wages in excessive drink and other forms of self-indulgence.' 'We have seen,' say the Commissioners, 'that one of the objects attempted by the present administration of the Poor Laws is to repeal *pro tanto* that law of nature by which the effects of each man's improvidence or misconduct are borne

¹ See page 97 of the Report, 1834.

by himself and his family. The effect of that attempt has been to repeal *pro tanto* the law by which each man and his family enjoy the benefit of his own prudence and virtue. In abolishing punishment we equally abolish reward.'

The Commissioners set forth their view of the general effects of the Poor Law system in language no less positive than the following: 'If twice the number of millions (collected for the poor-rate) were annually thrown into the sea, we might still be a moral, industrious, and flourishing nation. But if the whole of our poor-rates could be raised without inconvenience; if they were paid to us, for instance, as a tribute by foreigners, and were still applied as they are now applied, no excellence in our laws and institutions in other respects could save us from ultimate ruin.'

Thus do the Poor Law Enquiry Commissioners, in their Report of 1834, perorate, according to the abundant evidence which came before them. Such, as they assert, was the tendency of the old Poor Law, in regard to national wealth, and to the moral and material interests of the great mass of the population. The amended law, however, of 1834, framed on their Report, embodies, though with some modifications, the general principle of the old law, and through certain of its provisions has opened a way by which, as will be shown, we have been rapidly returning to the same state of things as existed under the old law. The same practice has come to prevail again as under

that law, the practice of 'relieving' at their own homes able-bodied paupers, as well as the sick and infirm. By the new law, maintenance in the workhouse was intended to be the rule, outdoor relief the rare exception ; but by a laxity, almost inevitable in the interpretation of its letter, its intention has been reversed, insomuch that out-relief has become the rule, and is now to indoor maintenance in the proportion of five to one. We have still in operation a system of law which encourages improvidence, discourages provident economy, makes the wages-receiver unduly independent of the wages-payer, and is hostile to morality and to temperate habits. Still the man who might find work, if it were necessary for procuring his subsistence, or the man who is reduced to necessity by self-indulgence or by misconduct of any kind, can tax the public for his support. Still the woman who has parted with her virtue can cast upon the ratepayers the burden of maintaining her offspring. Still is early and improvident marriage encouraged by the law. Still the husband can, by deserting his wife and children, throw their maintenance upon the public. Such is the recognised operation of the present, as of the old law ; of its abuses, and of the frauds practised under it, notice will be taken in the succeeding pages.

SECTION II.

TERMS ' LABOURING ' AND ' WORKING ' CLASSES.

BEFORE proceeding with this disquisition the writer will call attention to the common, but incorrect and fallacious, employment of the terms ' working classes,' 'labouring classes,' 'operatives,' and the like. The exclusive application of such terms to those whose work is of a physical kind unintentionally involves the idea that these are the only workers; that they are the 'bees,' all others the 'drones,' of the social hive. Let us, by the way, imagine but for a moment the existence of a commonwealth in which there were no other workers, no ministers of religion, no medical men, no lawyers, no teachers of literature and science, no statesmen, no artists, no traders even; in short, none whose special work is with the mind! Yet the peculiar appropriation of the terms 'working,' 'labouring,' &c., to those whose work is with the limbs and sinews, appears to involve the supposition that such are the only workers amongst us, and consequently seems to claim for labour of this one kind a monopoly of the consideration due to useful labour of all kinds.

It need scarcely be remarked that to all persons actively engaged in the divers occupations of mind, it seems an injustice, this exclusive application of the epithets 'working' and 'labouring' to those whose work and labour is with the physical faculties. But the reason why exception is now taken to the partial employment of these terms is that it unconsciously gives rise to much of the mistaken and exaggerated sentiment in vogue with regard to the condition, the supposed merits, claims, and sufferings of the favoured class to which the terms are appropriated—seems to furnish a plea for a special consideration of them to the disadvantage of the rest of the community, and for what Professor Fawcett calls in this case 'class legislation,' as being exclusively in favour of the particular class whose labours are with the physical, not the mental, faculties. This fallacy, couched under the common acceptance of the terms 'working' and 'labouring' classes, is akin to the fallacy involved in the limitation of the word 'people' to denote one class alone of the whole nation, and with the noted misuse of the term 'poor' to include even those who, enjoying health and strength, are living by the duly paid labour of their hands. In the pages following it is intended, in designating that portion of the population who subsist by labour of this kind, to employ terms free from the surmise of an invidious antithesis, and of a prejudice in favour of their compulsory maintenance in the adverse contingencies of life.

SECTION III.

MATERIAL MISCHIEF TO THE LOWER CLASSES.

IF a traveller were to report the discovery of an island in the Pacific where it was expressly ordained by law that, let any man or woman be as idle, or as improvident, or as disorderly, or as vicious as he or she pleased, such person could claim public support, either the traveller's veracity would be called into question, or the inhabitants of the island would be set down as a people of singularly perverted understandings. Yet the only difference between the law of this supposed island and the law of an existent island situated between the 50th and 60th degrees of north latitude, and about five degrees of east longitude, is that the Pacific law expressly ordains what the law of the existent island ordains by implication. The *effect* of the two laws would be the same, though it were not openly stated in both cases. Such is the Poor Law of England.

How to improve the material, social, and moral condition of the classes amongst us who live by the labour of their hands, or who, possessing no means, live by no labour, is a problem which has long exercised

the brain-power of earnest philanthropists and politicians. In spite of the increase of wealth, and consequently of expenditure in the employment of labour, these classes appear to have undergone no improvement either in their habits or their circumstances. The latest statistics of pauperism show no serious reduction in the number of actual paupers, notwithstanding the rise of wages. The same improvidence, the same wastefulness, the same helpless and abject poverty in large masses, are to be found in our population ; the same lack of self-support whenever sickness, or accident, or loss of employment befalls them, or when the feebleness of old age has come upon them. England is the richest, perhaps the most charitable, of nations, and yet one of the most pauperized and poverty-stricken.

‘*Pourquoi,*’ writes an intelligent Frenchman, ‘*dans l’Angleterre si riche y a-t-il tant de pauvres ?*’

In order to reduce this mass of poverty, and elevate the condition of these classes in social and moral respects, various methods are tried. We have ‘total abstinence’ societies, temperance societies, laws to regulate the sale of intoxicating liquors, increased means of education, free schools, orphan asylums, refuges, training ships for outcast boys, a countless number of hospitals for every kind of disease or physical infirmity, convalescent ‘homes,’ almshouses, soup-kitchens, large sums spent in individual alms, ‘organisation of charity,’ better dwellings, ‘wholesome houses’ provided or in

course of being provided, 'penny readings,' free libraries, museums, reading-rooms, at the public expense. How far all these and other methods have succeeded in elevating to any sensible degree the condition of the classes for whose benefit they are intended, must be but too evident to any observer.

Why have all these benevolent methods been attended with so little success as is generally known and acknowledged? Simply because they do not touch the root of the evil. What, then, is that root? Every one who has considered the subject knows it, whatever method he may propose for its eradication. Every such person knows that the root of the evil in the present condition of the population is their conspicuous improvidence. In this habit they notoriously exceed the populations of all other civilised countries; nay, they so far even return to that state of barbarism in which men, according to a well-known description—

Nec componere opes nôrant, nec parcere parto—

'had no notion of laying by their means nor husbanding their gains;' that is, lived 'from hand to mouth.' Even among the more industrious of our wages-earners this recklessness of future needs is widely prevalent. As a retired wages-earner, who himself (rare example!) has by honest industry and thrift secured a sufficient independence, observed of this class, in rough but pointed language, 'they work like horses, but spend their money like asses!' 'Even skill and industry,' remarks

a contemporary writer, 'are regarded by them as warrants for immediate self-indulgence rather than as means for securing ultimate independence.'

That this pre-eminent improvidence is mainly due to a Poor Law system such as exists in no other country, seems to be generally acknowledged ; but the tendency of this law to the positive discouragement of the opposite virtue is not perhaps equally evident, though equally deserving of notice. Thus, if a wages-earner have by the exercise of thrift secured to himself an annuity for his old age, he will have no claim for parish aid to supplement that annuity, though it may be less than the parish allowance given to an aged pauper. Or, if he have been a regular subscriber to a 'Friendly Society,' he will forfeit all claim to parochial relief during sickness, though the aid given by the society be insufficient for his needs. Parish relief is of necessity confined to cases of actual destitution, for which alone it was intended ; nor can Boards of Guardians draw a line limiting the amount of the applicant's private resources which shall not bar his claim to parish support. Yet that support must be granted in sickness or old age to men who have spent in self-indulgence every spare sixpence of their wages, as those wages were earned. Thus greatly is the disposition to thrift discouraged !¹

¹ The tendency of Poor Laws to *discourage* thrift—as also to press heavily on the numerous class of poorer ratepayers—is described by one of the representatives at the Poor Law Conference, held at Leicester in November, 1875 : 'Is it not the administration

An instructive instance of this discouragement was given not long since at a meeting of wages-earners in a western county, held to consult about establishing a Mutual Benefit Society. After some discussion of the proposal, one of them stopped the whole proceeding by pointing out to the others that they would have no claim to relief from poor-rate while they had money of their own in any form! There spoke a sentiment characteristic of a class! 'What is the use of saving? the parish must keep us,' is no uncommon language. The Poor Laws, in fact, discourage thrift, not only by raising the unthrifty to a level with the thrifty, but by creating a fictitious notion of right in poor-relief. Under the influence of this notion a man who had laid by a provision for age or infirmity would be regarded as having lost the sums which he would otherwise have obtained from the parish. He would also be liable to the reproaches of his compeers as a betrayer of the supposed rights of his class by forbearing to claim them; or, as the phrase is, by 'saving the parish.' With the prospect of such treatment from his fellows, who would be likely to exercise thrift in providing for the contingencies of his future?

of the Poor Law which has created pauperism, because it has left the poor man to go on spending his earnings in beer and drink, *because he sees that those around who have been thrifty are in no better position at last than the idle and vagabond?* So long as you have that condition of things, so long will you have this extravagant system of outdoor relief, bearing so heavily upon a class only just removed from those who are receiving relief.'—*Report of Leicester Conference*, pp. 331, 332.

These laws seem in effect to obliterate from the wages-earner's mind that regard for the rightful interests of others, and that feeling of self-respect, which would co-operate to keep him from throwing himself as a burden upon the property of his neighbours. Nay, through the influence of those laws that lesson of prudent precaution which the stern realities of life would teach is lost upon him. Sickness, accident, infirmities, he regards as evils which may affect him in the future, but against which not himself but the public are bound to provide. He takes these contingencies into account no more than they are taken into account by the careless child, or by the man whose fortune is assured to him.

Fear, it has been said, is the mother of foresight; but our Poor Law system removes fear with regard to the consequences of wastefulness. How can men be expected to exercise the self-denial necessary in providing against future needs, when there is a Magna Charta of Improvidence, inviting them to depend on the provision which it has made for them? 'Let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we'—can go upon the parish. Such is their practical sentiment; for has not a 'paternal' legislation undertaken to provide for their future necessities, from whatever cause they may arise? Our Poor Law system seems therefore to be the cause of the improvidence which results in so much of the misery and vice prevailing in our population.

An opportunity seems to be given for considering the important subject of compulsory maintenance and its effects, now that wages have risen to a higher level throughout the country, that the demand for labour is increased, and an agitation is going on for still higher wages. A time of raised wages and of abundant employment seems the fittest time for questioning the expediency of continuing to exempt the wages-earning portion of the community from the necessity of providing for their own maintenance. Further, their demand that wages should still be raised seems scarcely compatible with a demand to be maintained out of work by poor-rates, which are a species of tax upon the employers as well as upon other ratepayers. In short, but homely phrase, the wages-receiver cannot justly expect to 'have his bread buttered on both sides.' If wages were left to be regulated wholly by an adjustment between the wants of the wages-giver and the wants of the wages-taker, with no element like that of poor-rates or other taxation to disturb the transaction, wages would naturally be the higher. Agricultural labourers in particular cannot fairly expect that their wages should be as high as they might be if there were no poor-rates, since land, out of which both their wages and these rates are paid, can only bear a certain amount of charges, and has to remunerate three parties—the owner, the occupier, and the labourers upon it. Now, the owner on the average obtains no greater interest on the value

of his land than from 2 to 3 per cent.; that is, not more than he could obtain by investment in the public funds. The occupier makes no more than the ordinary mercantile profit on the capital and skill which he employs in agriculture; indeed, it would seem that his gains are less than those of successful trade, for seldom in comparison is a rich farmer to be found, and seldom in probates of wills is the estate of a farmer 'sworn under' amounts such as those for which the estates of merchants and other tradesmen weekly figure in the newspapers. There remains a third portion of the proceeds of land, and from this portion come wages and poor-rates. If, therefore, the landowner is to have his moderate interest, and the occupier his fair profit, all that is paid from the land in poor-rates will be in diminution of what is paid in wages. What is plus in rates will be minus in wages. It is, in fact, in great measure the pressure of poor-rates that keeps down the rate of agricultural wages; were there no poor-rates, wages (other things being equal) would be the higher. Wherever poor-rates have been heaviest, wages, except from some extraneous or temporary cause, have been low. A striking testimony to the tendency of poor-rates to lower wages is given in the Report of the Local Government Board for 1874, relating to the effect of 'relief in aid of wages,' a constant practice under the Poor Law, in exposing the independent poor to an unfair competition in the labour market with those who, deriving part of their

support from the poor-rate, can afford to sell their labour at a lower price.

Conversely, the reduction of poor-rates leads to the raising of wages—a fact of which proof is given in the following evidence¹ before the Poor Law Commissioners of 1832: ‘The absorption of the able-bodied paupers, or, in other words, their conversion into independent labourers employed within the parish (Poplar), was immediately followed by an improvement in wages.’ ‘The Rev. E. J. Faithful, Rector of Hatfield, examined: Have the wages of the independent labourers been improved since the change of system in the administration of the Poor Laws? *Ans.*—Decidedly so; and the wages are higher here than in any parish in the neighbourhood, where a similar system has not been adopted.’ ‘In the adjacent parish of Welwyn,’ continues the Report, ‘where the same system (of dispauperization) has been adopted, the wages of the independent labourers were improved. At Swallowfield one of the first results of the change was that single independent labourers received better wages. At Bingham, Southwell, and St. Mary’s, Nottingham, Mr. Cowell (an Assistant-Commissioner) made special enquiries as to the effect of the change upon the wages of labourers belonging to the classes receiving parochial relief, and found that in every instance there had been a striking improvement.’ These extracts from the Report, and the evidence accompanying it,

¹ See page 237 of their Report for 1834.

show that in proportion as compulsory maintenance, and therefore poor-rate, is reduced, the tendency of wages is to rise. It would therefore follow, that, if no compulsory maintenance were exacted, the money now expended in such maintenance would be expended in wages. In fact, the fewer the deductions from the fund from which wages are paid, the better wages, up to a certain point, will be paid. In other words, the richer a class of employers are, the more they can afford to pay in remuneration of work, and the more, within certain limits, they will pay in that form. This statement is illustrated by the well-known fact that in domestic service wealthier masters give higher wages than poorer masters, even though no more work and no greater skill be required from the servants.

One way in which the diminution of poor-rates affects favourably the rate of wages is well explained in the aforesaid Report. When the labourers who have been dependent on poor-rates are thrown upon their own industry, one might expect, at first thought, that by their competition the wages of the entire body of labourers would be injuriously affected. And this certainly would be the case if they added nothing to the fund from which wages came. But by their labour they add to that fund, and so enable the employer to give more wages to all his labourers. The more the labourers, within certain limits, whom he employs, the more are his gains, and the greater his power to remunerate the labourers. One single person who

has no property, and is supported without working, is, in fact, gratuitously supported by the industry of others. His conversion from a pauper living on the rates into a labourer producing his own subsistence, and, in addition to that, a profit to his employer, so far enables that employer to give better wages. Thus, then, it comes to pass that the money saved in poor-rates is soon paid in wages. On the other hand, it is evident that the anticipatory reliance upon poor-rates diminishes the rate of wages by encouraging illicit intercourse and improvident marriages, and thus giving an artificial stimulus to population. Hence, another generation of paupers, or an excessive competition in the labour market, by which wages must be reduced; while the increase of population, increasing the demand for the necessaries of life, must render those necessaries dearer, and consequently diminish the purchasing power of the wages, and so, *in effect*, reduce the wages themselves.

That poor-rates keep down wages is further seen from the fact that these rates are virtually a supplement of wages, making a provision for the disablement of the wages-earners. Except for these rates, the employers of labour would be compelled by the necessity of the case—the law of demand and supply—to give to their employés wages sufficient to enable them to provide against their disablement. But the law undertakes to make that provision for them; hence wages are lower than they would be if the law made no such provision.

It must be evident that it would on many accounts

be far better for the wages-earners if they made, and were in all cases enabled to make, this provision out of their wages, instead of the law making it for them. The provision which they would thus make for themselves would ordinarily be a more effectual provision than that which the law makes for them, and which of necessity is but barely sufficient for the purpose. In making this provision they would learn habits of accumulating for the prospective benefit of themselves and their families, to the great promotion of the material well-being of their class. However, the consideration that poor-laws furnish a supplement, such as it is, of wages, in providing for the disablement of the wages-earners, is an instance of the operation of those laws in keeping down the rate of actual wages.

Thus, then, is the welfare of the wages-earning portion of the population, in a material point of view, prejudiced by the system of compulsory maintenance. The stress of maintaining the idle and the improvident falls, in fact, upon the industrious and provident, so that whatever the former gain the latter must lose. Paupers live gratuitously upon a tax levied on the labour and savings of non-paupers. Pauperism, it has been well observed, reverses the primeval law, saying, 'In the sweat, not of thy face, but that of others, shalt thou have bread to eat.' The income which maintains an able-bodied pauper would, if not so expended, be applied directly or indirectly to the employment of labour. All that is given to the idle and improvident

would have been given to the industrious and provident. The parochial provision upon which pauperism depends is thus a tax upon wages as well as upon property. This tax, as it has been observed by Mr. Walker in his 'Original,' is levied on the best labourers in a larger proportion than on the worst, and its proceeds distributed to the worst in a larger proportion than to the best. The pauper, in fact, is like the spoiled child of a family, whose favours are in deduction from the claims of the other members of it. Surely all industrious and honest wages-earners, taking an intelligent view of their own interest, and perceiving that through the practice of compulsory maintenance they have in effect to provide all the necessaries of life for the idle and improvident of their own class, will be the first to welcome the prospect of a change which will sweep away the practice in question altogether. Indeed, the truth that poor-relief is a subtraction from the remuneration of their industry seems even now to be dawning on their intelligence. That such men are beginning to realise this truth may be judged from the following statement made by one of the representatives of Boards of Guardians at a recent Poor Law Conference :¹ 'I have reason to believe that some of the best men who have emigrated from North Lincolnshire have done so from a determination to separate themselves from a burden consequent on the

¹ Report of First Annual Poor Law Conference for North Midland District, held at Leicester, November 25, 1875, p. 333.

administration of the Poor Laws, rather than from any dissatisfaction on the labour question. One of my best men, who had not less than 3s. a day all last winter, left me in the spring, and told me he was determined to leave a country where the laws compelled men willing to work to maintain those who could, but would not, do so.'

But the depression of wages is only a small part of the detriment which a system of compulsory relief causes to the material interests of the hand-working population. The system tends to increase the very poverty which it proposes to relieve; and it exerts this tendency, not only by reducing wages below their natural level, but by removing the motives to thrift and accumulation, those great safeguards against poverty and prime sources of material wellbeing. There are but few people in the world who, having money in hand, will deny themselves present gratification, when they can securely reckon upon the supply of future needs. The Poor Law, in removing the motives to thrift, has the same effect with that of serfdom itself. This effect appears to have been one of the obstacles to the designs of Alexander I. of Russia for the emancipation of serfs in his dominions. 'The serfs of Esthonia and Courland,' writes his biographer,¹ 'by long habits of dependence on their superiors, were deprived of all thrift, or idea of providing against the winter seasons and old age.'

¹ Joyneville's 'Life of Alexander I.,' p. 181.

We are, however, sometimes told that wages are generally too low for the purposes of thrift ; and this flattering tale has often been repeated to the wages-earners themselves. No doubt, as we have endeavoured to show, wages are kept below their natural level by the operation of poor-rates as of other taxation. Still, in answer to the assertion that wages are too low to enable the earners to lay by any portion of them for future wants, it may be observed that, under the influence of our Poor Law system, when they receive increased wages they mostly spend the increase in buying more luxuries, particularly alcoholic liquors ; that they marry upon their wages, and undertake the expense of families ; that they can find funds for trades' unions, labour unions ; and that as a matter of fact some few receivers of wages, no better off than thousands of their fellows, do lay by, and that therefore others in similar circumstances might lay by also. It is also to be observed that the classes in question are too generally, and that chiefly through their traditional and often unconscious habit of reliance on the poor-rates, ignorant or indifferent about the methods of domestic economy, unable or careless to make their wages 'go' as far as they might be made to go. Nor must the fact be overlooked that, as during the last few years the wages of artisans and mechanics have greatly increased, and a considerable increase has also taken place in favour of agricultural labourers, so the ability to save is proportionably in-

creased. We hear of certain manual industries in which wages to the amount of 1*l.* or 1*l.* 10*s.* a day, or even more, are paid—indeed it is stated that in some cases artisans and artificers can, by regular work, obtain as much as five or six hundred pounds in the year. We learn upon high authority that there is now a tendency to the better remuneration of physical than of intellectual labour.¹ It appears also that the statement of the Earl of Derby at Edinburgh, that ‘the income-tax did not reach the working classes,’ caused some discussion among ‘working men,’ and that one of them in consequence wrote to his lordship, stating that ‘a large number of his fellow-workmen had paid, and were still paying, income-tax.’

Yet this increase or high rate of wages is seldom attended with the practice of prudent economy; and when the receivers of such wages are, either by their own voluntary act, or by causes out of their control, debarred from earning them, recourse is usually had to parochial rates, or to private beneficence, or to both expedients at the same time. Frequent accounts are given of the prodigal expenditure of high wages. Thus we hear of highly-paid workmen in one industry limiting their labours to four days, nay, in some cases to three days, in the week, and spending their earnings in the course of the next week; of the miners in a certain district feeding their greyhounds upon ‘prime

¹ Speech of the Right Hon. W. E. Gladstone, on delivering Art Prizes at Greenwich.

joints of mutton ;' of the artisans in a manufacturing district spending a large proportion of their wages in the most costly articles of food, such as are seldom seen at the tables of men of the professions or of moderate fixed incomes. Of these artisans it was said by a person who lived among them, ' They don't drink their wages ; they eat them.' The present writer was informed by an intimate friend, who had been staying in one of the mining districts, that, as he happened to be calling at a shop, the wife of a miner came in, and asked for some goods on credit, having, as she said, no ready money wherewith to pay for them. The master of the shop demurred to the request, as the woman was already much in his debt. Thereupon she began a recital of distress, relating how that her husband was in receipt of much higher wages since he had entered upon his present employment, but that he gave her less for the expenses of housekeeping—often no more than five shillings a week—while he spent the remainder in drink and other self-indulgence. When she had left the shop, the master of it expressed his belief in her story, which he said was but a picture of the common practice of the class; adding that the husband was in receipt of two pounds fifteen shillings a week, and that he and his compeers were in the habit of feasting together, away from their families, at chop-houses, on the best kinds of food, and sometimes on luxuries which had only just come into season. The production of the earliest vegetables for the consumption of

artisans in the neighbouring towns forms an important item of agricultural industry in a large manufacturing district of the North. The epicurism of the class in one of these towns was illustrated by the anecdote that on one occasion, it being October 2, the day when pheasants are first brought to sale, a master manufacturer, sending out in the forenoon to buy some of this game for his own table, found that he had been anticipated by the artisans, who at six o'clock in the morning, when the supply had just arrived, had been to the market and bought up the whole of it! In a Midland town, where the making of stockings is the staple trade, it is a point of honour with the weavers to have each of them a hare for dinner at a particular season of the year. At a town in the North, where a large iron industry is carried on, a visitor in going round the iron-works, under the guidance of a director, had a number of men pointed out to him who in four days of the week (and they would work no more) earned wages to the amount of 9*l.* 10*s.*, but whose wives and children, said the director, were mostly in rags. The director went on to account for the manner in which such wages were expended, and gave the following anecdote as an instance. 'I had occasion,' said he, 'to call the other day at one of these men's houses when he happened to be just going to dinner, and the man and his wife—for there were no children—were about to sit down to a sucking-pig, which the man of his own accord told me had cost a guinea!'

This high living of highly-paid hand-workers is so notorious as to afford food for merriment to jocular periodicals. 'Jolly fellows' all these, no doubt, with their luxurious dishes and flowing cups, while they can earn wages sufficient to support their jollity ; and no one would have a right to blame this jollity, were it not ultimately at the public expense. Nay, who can blame these hard-working wages-earners for snatching such pleasures as fall within their reach, when they merely act as he who should blame them would probably have acted in the same circumstances ? Can we uphold a state of law which tells men that they can thus indulge themselves with impunity, and then turn round and blame them as improvident ? It is not the men whom we should blame ; it is the law which makes them what they are. However, all this notorious expenditure in self-indulgence is an evidence that prudent parsimony in regard to wages might be practised by thousands to whom it is at present unknown.

Thus, then, the law of compulsory aid operates, by encouraging improvidence, to make wages-earners poor, and to keep them poor. In fact, first by aiding to reduce wages below their natural level, and then by removing the grand motive to economy in dealing with those wages, Poor Laws increase the poverty which they are apparently designed to diminish, and tend to keep down the hand-labouring classes below their proper level of material comfort. Well might the

sagacious Arthur Young observe that ‘the degree of indigence and misery is exactly in proportion to the assistance given to the poor by rates ;’ and the philanthropic Chalmers denounce ‘the cruelty of the poor-rate !’

An apparent attempt is no doubt sometimes made to deny the poverty-creating effect of our Poor Laws by pointing to the great amount of poverty in some countries where no similar laws exist. Yet assuredly there is an abundance of poverty here in England. And when the effect of our laws in creating poverty is spoken of, it is by no means implied that such laws are the only agency capable of working that mischief. Hence no amount of poverty in a country without Poor Laws can be cited as disproving their baneful nature in regard to the material welfare of a population.

In detailing the impoverishing effects of compulsory relief, we must not omit to mention the pressure which it exerts on the poorer, the ‘semi-pauperized,’ class of the ratepayers. This much-suffering portion of the community, already burdened with the maintenance of themselves and their families, are yet forced to bear the additional burden of aiding to maintain gratuitously other people and their families. Under this double weight they often break down, and sink from the position of ratepayers to that of participators in the produce of the rates. Thus, as Professor Fawcett observes on this point, ‘pauperism engenders pauperism,

and the process goes on with accumulating force.' ¹ It is perhaps unnecessary to cite testimony in proof of the weight with which poor-rates bear on a class only just raised above those who are receiving relief. ²

Such then, as we have endeavoured briefly to show, is the mischief in a merely material point of view which our Poor Law inflicts on the wages-earning population—such its impoverishing effects. Doubtless in some cases honest distress is relieved by it, or a rescue from hopeless poverty is effected by its timely aid; but experience shows that poverty is incalculably increased by it in the gross. A few may be benefited by its operation; but how many thousands of wages-earners—aye and of ratepayers also—suffer! The Poor Law, in fact, reversing a law of nature, by which the few suffer for the benefit of the many, makes the many suffer for the benefit of the few.

¹ 'Lectures on Pauperism,' p. 78.

² 'Poor-relief is in fact contributed by ratepayers, a large proportion of whom have perhaps worked harder, have been more frugal, temperate, and self-denying, and yet are hardly less poor than the very paupers whom they help to support.'—*Report of Poor Law Conference.*

SECTION IV.

DEMORALIZATION OF THE LOWER CLASSES.

THE damage, however, which the Poor Law system inflicts on the material condition of the population is even of less grave importance in comparison with its tendency to degrade and to demoralize. Little proof indeed of this tendency will be needed by those who have watched the operation of the system ; still less, if they have taken part in the administration of it. But those persons who may question the fact will probably be satisfied of its truth by a perusal of the luminous Report of the Poor Law Commissioners, published in 1834, to which reference has been made in this work. Therein may be seen the debased condition to which a large portion of the population were brought by the operation of such laws. Under these laws illegitimate offspring abounded, idleness flourished, drinking prevailed, prudence for men's own selves, their wives and families, and the care of indigent parents, became virtues almost obsolete among the wages-earning classes. Early and reckless marriages swelled the mass of pauperism ; while the lavish granting of parish relief was so far from producing content that it incited higher and still higher demands, which, when

they could no longer be granted, resulted in agricultural riots, incendiarism, and the reign of 'Swing.' It may indeed be urged that all this demoralization was owing to the former and unamended state of the Poor Law. It should, however, be borne in mind that the Poor Law, as it now stands, is identical in principle with the law in its former state, and that, in the administration of outdoor relief, the practice under the new law but too closely approaches the practice which obtained under the old law. Although a generation has passed away since the changes that were made in the then state of the law, yet to undo its effects on the character and habits of the mass would require a longer time and a greater legislative alteration. In truth, during the last six-and-twenty years we seem to have been fast going back to the old Poor Law system, from which we thought to have escaped through the legislation of 1834. During those years an increasing relaxation went on in the administration of Poor Law relief. Hence, notwithstanding an abundance of employment and a marked rise of wages, pauperism prevails to a serious extent, though in the last two years it has received a certain check. What, therefore, is said in the Report of 1834 as to the pauperizing and demoralizing effects of the 'old' system is applicable, with certain qualifications, to the present system.

The pauperizing effect of our present Poor Law is strikingly evinced by the fact that one person in every

thirty, or more than three per cent. of the whole population, are in receipt of relief. But no bare statistical fact will adequately represent the pauperizing effect of our Poor Laws. The mere number of paupers on the books is no sufficient gauge of the effect which these laws produce in spreading the leaven of a pauperized animus through the mass of the population. The humbler classes are bred in an atmosphere of pauperism, which is diffused around them by these laws, and which insensibly influences their 'morale' and habits. It is not only the reception of the Poor Law dole that pauperizes; it is the anticipation also of that dole as a resource against the consequences of improvidence. Even in parishes where poor-rates are low the possibility of coming upon them exerts a pauperizing influence throughout the inhabitants; just as in a market a small surplus supply of a particular commodity lowers its price.

Through the influence of the Poor Law a traditional habit of prospective dependence upon public aid has been formed in a large portion of the population, whether or no they may ever come to require that aid, and although this dependence upon it is often unconscious and instinctive, not deliberate and calculated.

Depending, however, on the prospect of this aid, they naturally spurn the bands of prudence and self-restraint. Hence it is that they alone, of all the classes in society, contract marriage without possessing means

of meeting the expenses which marriage entails, and generally without regard to the duty of abstaining from it for the purpose of succouring parents who may be in need. In many cases illicit intercourse is encouraged by the prospect of throwing illegitimate offspring upon the public support. Extremes meet: the pauper and the millionaire are the only two personages who need literally take no thought for the morrow, and who can dispense with the exercise of forecast in all earthly respects. The necessity of self-restraint and of respectability of conduct, which aids to keep men of business or of the professions from the imprudent or irregular gratification of their desires, is felt by paupers no more than by the wealthiest in the land. The children of paupers, though born in wedlock, cease to be a care to them when they have been deserted by their parents and left to the care of parochial authorities, to be placed in the workhouse or 'boarded out' in private families. Illegitimate children thrown upon parochial provision are usually maintained in either of these ways, or by the grant of outdoor relief. This 'boarding out' system seems to deserve a passing comment by the way. The encouragement which it gives to the multiplication and desertion of children, legitimate or illegitimate, is forcibly described by a recent writer, who has evidently made pauperism the subject of careful study. In a letter to the 'Times' of November 9, 1874, Lord Lyttelton observes as follows on the system of boarding out: 'No system has ever

been devised more directly opposed to the old—I hope I should not say obsolete—principle of directly encouraging independence, industry, and thrift among the labouring class, and directly encouraging their opposites. The system says to the working class : “ Marry and multiply, or multiply without marrying. In either case, if you have any difficulty in providing your children with every comfort, desert them and run away ; their interest in life will be infinitely promoted by your doing so.” And so far from exhorting and encouraging them, by insurance or otherwise, to provide for their children in case of their own death, it tells them not to do so, for as orphans they will be far better off than before. The Divine law says that the sin of parents shall be visited on their children. Certainly no one has ever inferred from this that man should actually co-operate with the said law by punishing the children ; but here we go to the opposite extreme, and say to the ill-disposed, the more you can get natural feelings and affections out of you, the more reckless of the future you can become, the better it will be for your children.’

It is painful to speak of the depravity which compulsory relief occasions through the maintenance which it provides for illegitimate offspring. For proofs of this effect we have only to turn to official documents which relate to this subject, and which but too strongly bear out the reproach cast on us as a nation by the great Irish agitator when he contrasted this disgrace of Eng-

land with the purity prevailing in the homes of the Irish peasantry.

The encouragement given by the Poor Law to the multiplication of illegitimate children is placed in a gloomy point of view by the following passage, which a Poor Law Inspector quotes from documentary evidence: 'It often happens with women with illegitimate children that after having one child they go out again and return to be confined within a very short time, sometimes having three or four children in this manner. When they find that they are wanted for desertion of their children in one Union they remove to another, often under another name, and are confined there; and thus go about leaving their bastard children chargeable up and down the country.'¹

The public maintenance of illegitimate offspring has had a similar effect with that of the method by which *enfants trouvés* were received in France under the first Empire, and which it was found necessary in the cause of public morals to abolish.

But reckless marriage and illicit intercourse, followed by the consignment of children to the parish, are not the only pauperizing and demoralizing results of the Poor Law system. The legal right to public relief practically abrogates the duty of parents to lay by for their children, and the duty of children to give succour to their parents. The first thought of either

¹ Report of Dr. Clutterbuck to the Local Government Board for 1874-5, pp. 217, 218.

party regarding the needs of the other party is, 'let them go to the parish.' Upon the broad back of 'the parish' is cast the burden which either they have laid upon themselves or Providence has laid upon them. The husband seldom thinks of making provision for the possible widowhood of his wife : it need hardly be said that all other ties of nature and relationship are usually disregarded in this matter. With respect to the neglect of filial duty in the maintenance of disabled and indigent parents, the recent Reports of Poor Law Inspectors teem with general statements and particular instances of this deplorable result of the operation of our Poor Law. One of these gentlemen says of a particular Union, what is notoriously applicable to almost all Unions, that 'relations, legally liable, very rarely contribute.' Legally liable ! The law, it seems, practically abrogates a natural duty, and then attempts to enforce it ! The aforesaid gentleman, however, gives the following instance in point, which fell under his own observation : 'On the day on which I attended a meeting of the Guardians of the West Firle Union an application was made under the following circumstances : The family desiring relief consisted of the following : an old man, aged 67, confessedly past work ; his wife, ten years younger, earned 4s. a week ; an unmarried son, aged 23, living with his parents, and earning 13s. 6d. a week ; another son, aged 17, also living in the (parents') house, and earning 10s. a week ; two children under eight years of age. It appeared

to me,' continues the Inspector, 'to be a case in which the workhouse ought to be offered, and that in the case of its not being accepted legal proceedings ought to have been taken against the eldest son. The guardians, however, granted a weekly allowance of 2s. and two gallons of flour. I was surprised to find that in several other Unions the guardians informed me that if a similar case was brought before them they would not be unwilling to grant out-relief.' Such is the Inspector's statement; upon which it may be observed that had legal proceedings been taken against the eldest son, who was living with his parents, and receiving 13s. 6d. a week, he might have defeated the purpose of those proceedings by marrying, and pleading his inability to aid in the maintenance of his parents. Stronger instances, however, than this of the neglect of children in competent circumstances to support their indigent parents will be familiar to those persons who have been cognisant of the administration of the Poor Law. The present writer remembers the case of a livery-stable-keeper who was carrying on a flourishing business, but whose aged father was left to be supported by the parish, and to work on the roads. In a manufacturing district, persons who have climbed from the position of wages-earning to that of mill-ownership are commonly observed to leave their destitute relatives to parish support. It may be apprehended that while 'relief' is almost as a matter of course granted by the parish to indigent parents their

children will be apt to neglect their plain duty to them in this matter. Poor Laws in fact serve as the 'Corban' among the Jews of old, in relation to the duties of the Fifth Commandment. In England and Scotland the commonness of the custom by which sons in competent circumstances thus abandon their parents is witnessed to by the fact that such abandonment brings with it no disgrace. Contrarywise, among the natives of Hindostan, as English residents tell us, while poverty, except in the case of those who choose to make a religious profession of it, is in ordinary times scarcely seen, it is a point of duty and honour to support aged or disabled relatives. To expatiate on the contrast were unnecessary.

The extent to which 'relief' has infringed upon filial duty amongst ourselves may be gathered from a startling statement made at a recent Poor Law Conference. 'I know,' said the speaker, 'that in many cases people have looked with astonishment as if they were injured by being called upon to perform the very first duty that rests upon them, to support those who had given them birth. It was brought to my notice the other day that in one of our large manufacturing towns there is actually an association formed for bringing about a repeal of the law, which "most unjustly and cruelly," as they allege, calls upon children to support their parents. If I had not been told of it by persons I can trust, I should have hardly thought it possible,' &c.¹ So completely has the Poor Law obliterated

¹ Speech of the Rev. Canon Willes, at the First Annual Poor

the sense of this duty from their minds, that they feel no shame in proclaiming their neglect of it !

The efficacy of a compulsory Poor Law in blunting domestic sensibilities is amply illustrated by the history of the Scottish Poor Law, which, notwithstanding the warnings of English experience, was introduced so lately as in the year 1845. There, in less than thirty years, an indifference to family feeling has grown up, which could be described by an eminent Scotchman in the following terms: 'A peasantry,' says Mr. McNiel Caird, 'who in my recollection were sensitive in the highest degree that any of their kindred had received parish relief, now too often claim it with eagerness, if given in money, though they still look upon the poor-house as degrading.' So quickly has the leaven of pauperism diffused itself through that well-educated and once self-respecting population !

In another and too common case is the dereliction of natural duties notoriously favoured by our pauper legislation. Husbands not unfrequently desert their wives in the assurance that they will be maintained by the rates. This desertion sometimes takes place by collusion with the wives, so that they may receive parish 'relief,' while the husbands send them secret remittances, thus bearing only a part of the burden of maintaining them and their children. In proof of this statement, the following quotation shall be made from

Law Conference for the North Midland District at Leicester, Nov. 24. See p. 332 of the Report of Conferences for 1875.

an Inspector's Report : ' At Plymouth, where deserted wives are, as a rule, given out-relief, one of the relieving officers informed me that he had found cases in which a wife had for several weeks been receiving relief while her husband had never been out of town, and many other cases in which the wife, whilst in receipt of relief, had been receiving remittances from her husband. Such remittances are very easily made without the knowledge of the relieving officer.'¹ Such the encouragement, such the facility, given by the Poor Law to throw the maintenance of wife and children upon public funds.

An instance of the encouragement given by the Poor Law to the temporary desertion of wives and children appeared in the 'Pall Mall Gazette' of February 21, 1876 : ' At the last meeting of the St. George's in the East Board of Guardians attention was called to several cases of wife-desertion. One of the guardians enquired why the men had not been punished. In reply, it was stated that the wives had ceased to be chargeable. The parish is saddled with the cost of the maintenance of the men's wives and families until the culprits are discovered. If the erring husband, without further resistance, is wise enough to take back the deserted ones, he need not compensate the parish, nor fear any consequences for his past misdeeds, inasmuch as the magistrates will not convict in any case where the wife and family have ceased to

¹ See Report of Mr. Wodehouse for 1871-2, p. 98.

become chargeable to the parish. The only chance of punishing the deserters is for the parish authorities to institute proceedings promptly, before he has had time to resume the performance of his domestic duties. When once he has succeeded in scrambling back to his vacant chair by the family fireside it is too late ; he is master of the situation ; he has enjoyed his holiday, and the parish must bear the cost.' If a parliament of paupers had framed the Poor Laws, they could hardly have operated more adversely to the claims of the family and of society !

But this system of law operates in other ways to the demoralization of the population. For example, it removes the great secondary deterrent, to many the primary, the temporal, deterrent, from irregular and disorderly conduct. What is it that aids to keep a great portion of the educated classes in the track of social duty but the fear of losing the means of self-support ? And yet we have a system of law which withdraws this wholesome apprehension from the minds of the bulk of the population. Thus the farm-labourer will seldom be deterred from a breach of morality by the prospect of a dismissal, knowing that, even if he lose his situation, he can go to the parish for support, or that another employer will engage him lest the parish should have to bear an additional burden. Or he neglects some necessary or important piece of work and duty connected with his employment ; but, for the reason above mentioned, he cares not for the just dis-

pleasure of his employer. Perhaps he is reproved for his neglect, and, impatient of censure, he throws up his employment. Farmers complain that they cannot 'speak to'—*i.e.* censure—their men. As for bearing any excessive or unmerited blame with manly patience and forbearance—which professional men, subalterns in the army and navy, clerks in public offices, are often called upon to exhibit towards their superiors—the wages-earner, trusting, consciously or unconsciously, to immediate or ultimate support at the public expense, will seldom brook such blame for a moment. He knows that in one sense he is an independent man, born to an estate lying in his neighbours' pockets, and to him deserved reproof appears an indignity, undeserved reproof an intolerable outrage. Thus the class which depends on Poor Laws is placed in a position of false independence toward the classes above it. Poor Laws, in fact, as they relax the ties of natural duty and affection, and are injurious in their effects upon morality, so also foster a contempt of relative and social duty, and a spirit of defiance and self-will.¹ The

¹ The effect of Poor Law relief in perverting the mutual feelings and disorganising the relations between employers and employed is touched upon by the representative of a Board of Guardians at the Leicester Conference, to which reference has already been made. 'One of the collateral advantages of the gradual diminution or abolition of outdoor relief will be the restoration of something of the old English feeling between employers and employed, which once happily characterised our country, but which has been gradually decaying, and has now become a mere matter of money, and not a matter of human feeling between those in a higher and those

wonder is, not that such effects have been produced in perverting and corrupting the population, but that they have not been produced even more extensively.

Among the demoralizing effects of compulsive maintenance must be mentioned also the various frauds to which it gives occasion. 'The frauds,' says Mr. Chadwick in the Report of 1834, 'committed in consequence of the facilities which the system of granting outdoor relief affords, are such as these:—parties receiving relief as being out of work, being in work; parties who have received relief in consequence of being actually out of work continuing to receive relief after they have obtained work; parties who have received out-relief in money on account of sickness, continuing to receive that relief after they have recovered; women receiving relief on the ground that they have been deserted by their husbands, while their husbands are living with them; women receiving relief for themselves and family on the pretence that the husband is absent in search of work, while he is absent in full work; persons continuing to receive pensions for children or relatives as if they were alive, when they are dead.'

The evidence of another witness to the frauds to which poor-relief gives rise, is as follows: 'All the

in a lower position. The present feeling is bad, and will increase under the present system; but if, on the other hand, you bring the poor face to face with the real facts of life you will gradually restore some of those graces of feeling between man and man, which one now sees dying out so rapidly.'—*Report of Conferences*, p. 335.

tricks and deceptions of which man is capable are resorted to, the vilest and most barefaced falsehoods are uttered, and all the worst characteristics of human nature are called into exercise for the purpose of exciting a favourable feeling in their behalf; the children are eye and ear witnesses to all this. The child remembers his father's actions, and the hereditary pauper increases his ranks by instruction as well as example.' It may indeed be objected that for the success of these fraudulent practices parish officers are partly to be blamed; but it may be replied that the number of paupers is often so great as to defy the most careful attempts at discrimination. To this point is the evidence of the Assistant-Overseer of a London parish: 'In such a parish as ours, where we administer relief to upwards of 2,000 poor, it is impossible to prevent fraud, whatever vigilance is exercised.' It may again be objected that this evidence relates to the state of things under the unamended Poor Law; but the answer is that the fraudulent practices in question arise from a practice common to the amended and to the unamended law—the practice of outdoor relief. It may also be answered that according to the Reports of present Poor Law Inspectors similar frauds are carried on under the amended law. Thus, one of these gentlemen states that relief voted for outdoor paupers is often intercepted on the way to them. Another Inspector mentions that food ordered under medical advice to be given to invalid outdoor paupers is

often consumed by the hale members of the families. Another Inspector gives the following instance of the kind of fraud practised in regard to the allowances intended for pauper children: 'A woman appeared before the Falmouth Board of Guardians with a child, which she stated to be the illegitimate child of her sister, who had lately died at Truro. She professed to be unwilling to allow the child to be taken into the workhouse, and offered to take care of it if a small allowance of outdoor relief were granted. The guardians granted the relief for three months. . . Upon enquiry it was ascertained that, as soon as the relief had been ordered, the woman sent back the child to its friends at Truro, and had come herself every week to the relief station and received the relief.' Similar instances are not wanting in Poor Law Inspectors' Reports. Such are the premiums which the Poor Law system offers to practices of fraud, impairing that habit of truthfulness and honest practice which has characterised our people.

A chronic state of discontent among those who are immediately affected by this system may also be classed with its demoralizing effects. It might perhaps have been anticipated that the provision of a gratuitous maintenance for all who, by whatever cause, were brought to beggary, would have been regarded as a boon. Experience, however, has shown that this provision is regarded not as a boon but as a right, and, frequently, as a right which in practice is but

partially recognised by those who administer it. The maintenance granted is apt to create a constant hankering after a more liberal maintenance. 'The greatest paupers are the greatest grumblers,' while, on the other hand, the industrious and prudent wages-earner is generally one of the most contented of men. In fact, a compulsory relief system places the portion of the community from which that relief is drawn, and the portion by which it is received, in a false position together. What the former give in order to feed, to clothe, to house the latter is made a matter of quasi-right, not of benevolence ; a debt instead of a favour ; and the indigent are strangely put in the relation of creditors to an indefinite extent on the more prosperous. From the false position in which the two great classes of poor-rate payers and poor-rate receivers are thus placed towards each other, misunderstandings and inconveniences necessarily arise ; antagonistic interests are created—one party is apt to grudge what it gives, the other to be dissatisfied with what it receives ; and the one party naturally resists the vague and fictitious ideas of right which the law suggests to the other party. Suspicion and misgiving are increased on the one side, enmity and discontent on the other.

A proof that discontent is one of the fruits of the compulsory system of relief is furnished by the Report of the Poor Law Commissioners for 1834, who therein give their opinion, founded on evidence, that the Poor Laws were the chief cause of the agricultural tumults,

riots, and rick-burnings of 1830-1; and who inform us that these outbreaks and outrages prevailed most 'in those districts in which the Poor Laws were most laxly administered;' that is, where 'relief' was most lavishly given.

'To satisfy,' say these Commissioners, 'the clamours of the undeserving, the general scale of relief is raised; but the ultimate result of such a proceeding appears always to be to augment the distress which it was intended to mitigate, and to render more fierce the discontent which it was intended to appease. Profuse allowances excite the most extravagant expectations on the part of the claimants, who conceive that an inexhaustible fund is devoted to their use, and that they are wronged to the extent of whatever falls short of their claims. Such relief partakes of the nature of indiscriminating almsgiving in its effects, as a bounty on indolence and vice; but the apparently legal sanction to this parochial almsgiving renders the discontent on denial the most intense.'

'It appears,' continue the Commissioners, 'from all our returns, that in every district the discontent of the labouring classes is proportionate to the money distributed in poor-rates or in voluntary charities. . . In Newbury and Reading the money dispensed in poor-rates and charity is as great as could be desired by the warmest advocates either of compulsory or of voluntary relief, and yet during the agricultural riots many of the inhabitants in both towns were under

strong apprehensions of the rising of the very people among whom the poor-rates and charities are so profusely distributed. The violence of most of the mobs seemed to have arisen from an idea that all their privations arose from the cupidity or fraud of those entrusted with the management of the fund provided for the poor. Those who work, though receiving good wages, being called poor and classed with the really indigent, think themselves entitled to a share in the "poor-funds." Whatever addition is made to allowances excites the expectation of still further allowances, increases the conception of the extent of the right, and causes proportionate disappointment and hatred if that expectation is not satisfied. On the other hand, wherever the objects of expectation have been made definite, where wages upon the performance of work have been allowed to remain matter of contract, employment has again produced content, and kindness becomes again a source of gratitude.'

It cannot well be doubted, on reading the above statements, that discontent is one of the consequences of Poor Law gratuities.

Of the peculiar tendency of these gratuities to destroy self-respect and self-dependence, a striking illustration is given in the just observation that 'even the least contact with parochial assistance seems to be degrading.' This observation is confirmed by the testimony of many persons of experience, which was given

to the Poor Law Commissioners.¹ One of these witnesses, a magistrate and landowner, the late highly and deservedly respected Mr. Raymond Barker, of Hambledon, Bucks, says: 'In the year 1821 there were two labourers who were reported to me as extremely industrious men, maintaining large families; neither of them had applied for parish relief. I thought it was advisable that they should receive some mark of public approbation, and we gave them 1*l.* apiece from the parish. Very shortly they both became applicants for relief, and have continued so ever since. I am not aware that any other cause existed for this change in the conduct of these two men than the above-mentioned gratuity.'

Another witness, who had been much versed in the administration of the Poor Law, thus expresses himself on the same point: 'I can decidedly state, as the result of my experience, that, when once a family has received relief, it is to be expected that their descendants for some generations will receive it also.'

But the statements of a third witness are even more decisive as to the amazing power of parish relief to break down even a strong feeling of honest independence and self-respect. 'The change,' says a former overseer of an East London parish, 'that is made in the character and habits of the poor by *once* receiving parochial relief, is quite remarkable; they are demoralized ever afterwards. I remember the case of a family

¹ See pp. 93, 94 of Report, 1834.

named Wintle, consisting of a man, his wife, and five children. About two years ago, the father, mother, and two children were very ill and reduced to great distress, being obliged to sell all their little furniture for their subsistence. I went to them to offer relief; they, however, strenuously refused the aid. I reported this to the churchwarden, who determined to accompany me, and together we again pressed on the family the *necessity* of receiving relief; but still they refused, and we could not prevail upon them to accept our offer. We felt so much interested in the case, however, that we sent them 4s. in a parcel with a letter, desiring them to apply for more if they continued ill: this they did, and from that time to this (now more than two years) I do not believe that they have been for three weeks off our books, although there has been little or no ill health in the family. Thus we effectually spoiled the habits acquired by their previous industry; and I have no hesitation in saying that in nine cases out of ten such is the constant effect of having once tasted of parish bounty. This applies as much to the young as to the middle-aged, and as much to the middle-aged as to the old. I state it confidently, as the result of my experience, that, if once a young lad gets a pair of shoes given him by the parish, he never afterwards lays by sufficient to buy a pair; so, if we give to the fathers or mothers of children clothing or other assistance, they invariably apply again and again.'

'The regular applicants for relief are generally of

one family ; the disease is hereditary ; and when once a family has applied for relief, they are pressed down for ever.'

One more testimony to the same effect shall be added : ' Whether in work or out of work, when they once become paupers, it can only be by a sort of miracle that they can be broken off.'

From this evidence it appears that a single reception of parish relief is like having once been in a prison, rendering the subject of it insensible to a repetition of the disgrace. ' Once a pauper, always a pauper.'

The inroad which the reception of Poor Law bounty makes on self-respect is seen from another point of view. Even when an applicant's necessity arises from mere misfortune (a rare case), he will of course be classed as a pauper with those whose applications are rendered necessary by the consequences of their own misconduct or folly. Hence in his case is the distinction obliterated between honest unavoidable poverty which has a real claim upon compassionate help, and poverty which is the result of wilful act. Both cases, though differing as the poles, must be treated alike and placed in the same category ; and poverty and pauperism become convertible terms. Hence the honest, industrious, and prudently disposed but unfortunate man suffers unmerited disgrace, and has a sense that he is lowered in the estimation of others, which is a long step towards the loss of his own self-respect ; for men are very apt to become what they are set down for, and to prove reck-

less in conduct when they have no character nor a decent social status to keep up.

I proceed to speak, lastly, of the most patent and striking of all the instances of the demoralization occasioned by the Poor Law. It is out of place here to speak of the *material* loss incurred by the wages-earning population through excessive self-indulgence in the use of alcoholic liquors. The observation, however, shall be made by the way that the amount of the wages annually spent by them in drink, beyond what is useful for recruiting their strength or even allowable for their temperate enjoyment, far exceeds 8,000,000*l.*, the annual amount of Poor Law expenditure; it follows therefore that, if they abstained as a class from drinking beyond these reasonable limits, they would be able to dispense with the aid of Poor Laws. The 8,000,000*l.*, and much more, which they would thus save, would materially add to the comfort of themselves and their families; while, as it is contended in these pages, Poor Law relief is in its effects hostile to their comfort no less than to their moral and social welfare.

The large proportion of public revenue derived from the Customs and excise on spirits, and from the malt-tax, and, it may be added, the flourishing condition of the great brewing interest throughout the kingdom, may be regarded as fair indices of the amount of wages spent in alcoholic liquor. In a well-informed article in 'Macmillan's Magazine' for December 1875, entitled 'The Drinking System ; its effect on national prosperity

and the rate of wages,' it is estimated that 140,000,000*l.* are annually expended in this country on intoxicating drinks. If the correctness of this estimate be assumed, and it be further assumed that twenty of these millions are expended in liquor by the non-wages-earning classes and their households, it will follow that a hundred and twenty millions are annually spent by the wages-earning class in this species of luxury. It can hardly be doubted that the expenditure of wages in this manner is encouraged and facilitated by the existence of a certain provision against any of those contingencies which may preclude the earning of wages.

The connection of drinking with pauper-laws and pauperism is worthy of remark. These laws appear to encourage drinking, and again drinking is a fertile cause of pauperism. Of the 119 governors of workhouses whose opinion was obtained as to the effect of drinking in producing pauperism, some estimated the amount at one half, while their average estimate was that 73 per cent. of our pauperism is caused by drinking. Thus, then, Poor Laws appear to encourage drinking, and drinking may be regarded as a chief cause of pauperism.

It is unnecessary to dilate upon the prevalence of excessive drinking in this country—of the crime, the disease, the insanity, of which it is a cause; to speak of the destitution and degradation which it entails upon the wives and children of those who practise this vice, and of the destruction of self-respect and of natural affection involved in the practice; to speak of wages,

sometimes above the average incomes of more than one of the professions, not applied to the comfortable maintenance of families, nor to prudent purposes of economy, nor yet to the support of disabled relatives, but consumed in this sensual form of self-indulgence. Examples of extravagance and excess in drinking are but too familiar to the public. One example, however, shall be given which lately came under the notice of the writer. At a meeting on the public-house question, a speaker of undoubted veracity said 'he had known a navvy, a fine fellow too, who when working on the railway had earned as much as 2*l.* 2*s.*, 2*l.* 10*s.*, and sometimes 3*l.* per week. He used to send home for rent, wife and family, 18*s.* per week, and spent the rest in drink, often getting rid of the surplus by Monday morning.' The chairman of this meeting 'had read in a paper the other day that a gentleman travelling on the Continent said he had never seen a drunken person ; but on returning to this country, whilst driving from the railway station to his own home, he passed fourteen drunken persons.'

We are told by the leading journal that 'the general rise of wages throughout the country has given the working classes more means than ever of indulging in their favourite enjoyment.' And why? Manifestly because we have laws interfering with the course of nature ; laws which tell the drinker that it matters not as regards his own maintenance in time to come how much he wastes his substance in his accustomed self-

indulgence; but that when disease sets in, or work flags, or accident happens, or old age comes on, the public will maintain him out of the earnings and savings of others. The sure calculation upon this future maintenance at the expense of others may not be present to his mind; in such case he has but caught the infection of that pauperized animus which the traditions and practice of Poor Law help have spread through the wages-earning population. Consciously, however, or unconsciously, he looks forward to Poor Law maintenance as his ultimate refuge, when 'the worst shall have come to the worst.' Of this 'excess,' says Mr. Walker, 'crime or the parish is the resource.'

It is not uncommon, indeed, to point to the 'miserable,' the 'squalid' condition of the houses of many of our wages-earners, as accounting for their prevalent habit of excess in the consumption of intoxicating liquors. Thus, for example, at a temperance meeting lately held at Consett, in the county of Durham, one of the speakers, manager of the local iron-works, stated that 'one in forty of the people of that county had, during the last twelve months, been convicted of drunkenness;' and he then went on to express a belief that 'the drinking habits of the county were owing in great measure to the want of comfortable homes for working men.'¹ Now in the oft-recurring statements of this kind it seems to be forgotten that the discomfort of these homes is very much owing to the habits of the inmates of them.

¹ 'Pall Mall Gazette,' Jan. 4, 1876.

Possibly material disorder may react detrimentally on the moral order, by impairing self-respect, health, and cheerfulness ; but for the most part it is the moral order which is the parent of the material order. That the intemperance of our people is owing to the squalor and discomfort of their dwellings appears to be a truly preposterous supposition, putting the effect for the cause, and the cause for the effect. The intemperate habits of the men are often laid to the charge of their unfortunate wives, who, by the uncleanness, disorder, and discomfort which they permit in their homes, are said to 'drive their husbands to the public-house.' Yet so great is the plasticity of the female nature that the conduct of most wives must in great measure be shaped by the conduct of their husbands. The intemperance, and therefore wastefulness, of these men, not only leaves the wives without the due means of maintaining domestic comfort, but also induces in them an habitual dejection of mind, a benumbing sense of helplessness, and consequently an indifference to domestic economy, arrangement, 'tidiness,' and all the seemly, not to say decorative, surroundings of common life. If the husbands were temperate, and devoted to the purposes of housekeeping a due part of the sums now expended in excess, their wives would be better 'housewives,' and their homes would be more comfortable. Their intemperate habits may more reasonably be traced, not to the slovenliness of their wives, and the consequent ill-condition of their homes, but to

that dependence on a public provision and that demoralized animus which produce alike indifference to future contingencies and to present disorder. Even when more spacious accommodation has been provided for them, they often neutralise the advantage by crowding the added space with lodgers; and in some instances have been known to regret the warmth and 'snugness' of their former habitations. As well might it be said that the wandering habits of gipsies are because they have no houses, when in truth, if they had houses, they would prefer not to live in them.

It may here be remarked, in passing, that to the latter physical cause—deficient accommodation in cottages—much of the immorality among our humbler classes has been popularly ascribed. To account thus for English immorality is to ignore the physical surroundings of the Irish peasantry in their homes. How little can the arrangements or condition of people's dwellings have to do with the principles of the inmates as regards temperance or morality! Little, indeed, in comparison with the influences of custom founded upon law.

There are those, too, who seem to ascribe the prevalence of drunkenness to the non-existence of laws to prohibit the supply of intoxicating liquors. Surely, however, the enactment of such laws would be to begin at the wrong end; for, where the demand for liquor exists, the supply will not be far to seek. The torrent of drunkenness cannot be dammed up by legislative

contrivances. Its source may be dried up if, instead of converting so much of their wages into liquor, the earners shall have to reserve as much of them for future needs. People cannot be made temperate or moral by Acts of Parliament; but much may be done towards both these objects by *repealing* laws of compulsory relief. Our Poor Laws are in fact as hostile to temperance as they are to continence, to chastity, to the discharge of relative and social duty, to contentment, to self-respect, and manly self-dependence.

An ancient historian mentions the effect, in breaking the independent spirit of a brave people, produced by the introduction of the vices and luxurious habits of their conquerors. It might safely be said that a conquering people, desirous of weakening the moral fibre of a half-subdued and recalcitrant population, could hardly take a more effectual course than to establish among them a liberal system of compulsory poor-relief! Well might Professor Fawcett observe, in his 'Lectures on Pauperism,' that 'the legal claim which every one in this country possessed to be maintained out of the rates, represents perhaps the most perilous responsibility ever assumed by a nation. Some of our leading statesmen,' continues he, 'endeavour to alarm us with the risk involved in the promise to defend the independence of a neighbouring nation. But what is the danger thus incurred compared with the perils involved in the promise to maintain all the pauperism that can be called into existence by encouraging

indolence, and by rewarding, instead of punishing, those who recklessly indulge their passions? England was brought nearer to the brink of ruin by the old Poor Law than she ever was by a hostile army. . . . Fully admitting that the Act of 1834 introduced many improvements, it cannot be denied that pauperism still exists to a most alarming extent. Much of the evil influence exerted by the old Poor Law upon the general social condition of the country still continues in operation.'

It is a striking evidence of the demoralizing influences of our Poor Laws when the leading journal can make the following remarks upon the character and condition of the classes in question: 'With all the vast increase of their wages, the working classes as a body have done nothing to improve their condition. They are not better dressed, nor better housed, nor better educated than they were. They eat more, they drink more, and grumble more, but they work less. They do not provide for old age, or for their poor relations; but as soon as work flags, or illness sets in, or old age comes on, they put in their claim for Poor Law relief, which has been all along paid by the classes whom they revile, and whom they have done their best to injure.' It would seem that some great deterioration has taken place during the last twenty years in the character of these classes concurrently with the relaxation of Poor Law administration; for assuredly such language as the above is very different from the

high-flown language then commonly held by journalists and public men concerning the virtues and merits which had been discovered in the 'British workman.' This flattery, it may in passing be observed, must have tended powerfully to encourage in their weaknesses and vices the class to which it has been addressed both by self-seeking and sentimental writers and speakers. Not less luscious than the praises with which Oriental potentates are usually regaled, it has so much vitiated their mental taste that, as the 'Journeyman Engineer,'¹ himself one of the class, has informed us, they will be pleased with no address that is not highly sweetened with its flavour! However, demoralization, owing, as is here contended, very much to Poor Law influences, has so deeply tainted the domestic life of this class, that a Poor Law Inspector, in his report on the 'boarding out' system, can notice the extreme difficulty of finding homes, whether in town or village, sufficiently pure and well-ordered for the reception of children whom their parents have left to the care of the parish.² Readers will remember the picture which one of our leading public men,³ at a fearless risk of popularity, drew of the social condition of the class which is subject to the immediate operation of these influences. The testimony of the author of 'Our New Masters' is not less decisive. 'The home life,' says he,

¹ 'Our New Masters.'

² Rev. Dr. Clutterbuck's Report for 1874-5, pp. 220-222.

³ The Right Hon. Robert Lowe, M.P.: 'Ignorant, violent, venal, and drunken.'

of a vast number of the working classes is something simply horrible. The bringing up of the children is perhaps the most horrible feature of all in this matter. The sexes mingle together promiscuously; and as not only are they not taught anything of morality, but immorality both in word and deed is openly practised among them, the result is that many, very many of them, are physically as well as morally corrupted while yet mere children.' 'The condition of our labouring classes, agricultural and urban,' says the Poor Law Inspector above mentioned, 'is such as to create serious alarm in any thoughtful mind.' Such is the corruption generated between poverty and vice in this wealthy and charitable community!

But not in this country alone have the pauperizing and demoralizing effects of compulsory relief been exhibited. These effects are as clearly seen in the contemporary history of another European country. It appears by the Report on 'Poor Laws in Foreign Countries,' published last year by the Local Government Board, that before the year 1871 a system of Poor Law was in operation in Sweden similar to our own system. We are therefore not surprised to learn from this Report that 'in 1833 the number of poor had increased in proportion to the population,' and that there was 'an enormous increase of pauperism and expenditure;' or to find it stated that in 1833, under that system, 'the Swedish artisan is neither so industrious or frugal as formerly; he has heard that the destitute able-bodied

are in England supported by the parish ; he claims similar relief, and *alleges his expectation of it as an excuse for prodigality or indifference to saving.*' It is stated also that 'there was a time further back in the history of Sweden when each family sustained its destitute and impotent, and would have deemed it a shame to receive support from others.' This disastrous system of Poor Laws in Sweden underwent, in 1871, a rectification somewhat after the model of our new law of 1834, only more thorough. Under its un-amended Poor Law it would seem that intemperance, as also laxity of morals, prevailed in Sweden to an extent scarcely, if at all, surpassed in any other European country.

In another Scandinavian kingdom, Denmark, where a general 'right' to relief is given by law, pauperism became so prevalent that it was found necessary, in 1869, to appoint a Royal Commission 'to consider the whole question of public relief.' The Report of this Commission 'advises the literal restriction of public relief to such persons as are actually unable to work ;' and a Government Bill embodying this provision was expected to be presented to the Danish Legislature. The Consul, however, who makes this statement, adds : 'Whatever Bill be introduced, the democratic agricultural majority of the Folkething will assuredly insist on large modifications suited to the view which the agrarian mind takes of its own specific interests.'¹ I

¹ Report on 'Foreign Poor Laws,' p. 135.

would here mention that the effect of the present Poor Law in Denmark may be conjectured from two significant facts, that in the principal Copenhagen work-house '6,000 quarts of brandy are annually sold to the inmates, and tobacco for above 1,000 dollars;' and that 'in 1867 about half the inmates absconded with property and clothes belonging to the establishment.'¹

Such are the demoralizing and pauperizing effects which are wrought by the principle of compulsory relief in other countries than England, wherein it is in force.

On the other hand, in countries into which it has not been introduced, such as France, Luxemburg, and Holland, the expenditure of earnings in intoxicating liquors and in other forms of self-indulgence is comparatively moderate, and we find, on the contrary, frugal and provident populations. Small indeed must be the expenditure of the French peasantry in self-indulgence when their Government could satisfy, by means of their accumulations, a large part of the Prussian war exactions!

To sum up the effects which, according to the copious testimony above cited, as well as the results of daily observation and experience, are wrought upon the most numerous class of the nation by a system of compulsory relief, it may be asserted that that system is hostile to the material interests, the social condition, the moral order, of the class in question; increasing

¹ P. 133 of 'Foreign Poor Law Report.'

poverty and its attendant miseries, encouraging improvidence, discouraging the opposite virtue, relaxing the obligations of the family tie, lowering self-respect, breaking down honest independence, fostering discontent and a spirit of lawless self-will, and taking away the fear of those consequences which would operate as deterrents from immorality and intemperance.

SECTION V.

ECONOMIC ASPECT OF THE POOR LAW.

HAVING thus attempted to point out the mischief in material, social, and moral respects which the law of compulsory maintenance inflicts upon the wages-earning population, I proceed to notice the loss which this system of law causes to the general wealth of the nation. On this point the consideration is obvious that all the expenditure of poor-rates is in its very nature unproductive. The expenditure of one year in nowise diminishes the expenditure of the next year. This, as the payment of interest on the National Debt, is a running sore of the body politic—a constant drain upon its material strength and resources. The tendency of Poor Law expenditure is to increase by increasing the poverty which it proposes to relieve. It first creates the wants which it then supplies, and by supplying those wants creates further wants. It annually diverts a large sum of money from being employed in such ways as would add to the capital, the wealth, the great wages-fund of the country. The amount annually expended in our Poor Law administration may be put in round numbers at 8,000,000*l*. Were these eight

millions of pounds not thrown annually into the gulf of pauperism, they would chiefly be expended, directly or indirectly, in the remuneration of productive labour. The late Mr. Walker, in one of the profound and suggestive papers on pauperism contained in his 'Original,' computes that of every 1,000*l.* now expended annually in poor-rates, no less than 900*l.* would be expended in labour. If we assume the correctness of his calculation, it follows that were the 8,000,000*l.* saved for one year from Poor Law expenditure, then 7,200,000*l.* of the amount would be employed in the remuneration of labour. Say that the profits of 7,200,000*l.* expended in this manner would be only at the rate of 10 per cent. per annum upon it, then 720,000*l.* would be added in one year to the capital—the wages-fund—of the country. Next year, upon the above supposition, there would be 14,400,000*l.* + 720,000*l.* = 15,120,000*l.* to employ in the remuneration of labour. If this calculation be extended only to ten years, some idea may be formed of the loss to national resources accruing from Poor Law expenditure. It is at any rate clear that this unproductive expenditure amounts in ten years to 80,000,000*l.* At the same time it is evident that a considerable part of this money, as of all the other money paid in wages, would, were there no poor-relief to be depended upon, be saved by the wages-takers, and that their means would be proportionately increased. Much of their wages would doubtless come to be invested by them in ways which, while benefiting themselves, would aug-

ment the general wealth of the nation. These considerations may serve towards illustrating the waste which the country suffers through the system in question, and the gain to the national resources which otherwise would accrue.

It may be added, that the injurious effects which habits of self-indulgence, favoured by Poor Laws, have upon the health and intelligence of the classes in question, must largely detract from their effectiveness as producers of national wealth, tending to place them at a still greater disadvantage with the more sober and more highly educated artisans of other countries.

In further illustration of the antagonism of Poor Laws to national wealth, the obvious remark shall be repeated, that these laws embody the principle of Communism or Socialism, which proposes the depredation of the more prosperous for the benefit of the unprosperous—a principle not only openly hostile to society itself, but which, if in any conceivable circumstances it could once be fully carried out, would have the effect, not of enriching the poor, but of plunging all into poverty. Nay, as we have seen, even the limited application of this principle by means of our Poor Laws, while it mulcts the ‘better-to-do,’ only has the effect of enlarging the area of poverty. The condemnation of the Poor Laws on the ground that they involve the principle of Communism, uttered even by a ‘working man’ in the House of Commons, is worthy of citation, both as coming from such a quarter, and

as aptly illustrating the fact that they involve that principle. In a debate on Friendly Societies on June 22, 1874, Mr. Macdonald, the member for Stafford, observed : ‘ Well-regulated Benefit Societies might enable them to dispense with the Poor Laws, which he regarded as the thin edge of Communism ; for, if a twentieth part of the income of the prosperous portion of the public were taken from them to-day to support the poor, the time might come when all the income of the provident portion of the people might be applied to the support of the improvident.’¹ The cogency of this reasoning cannot be disputed ; for the smallest application of the principle of Communism must create, in the minds of those who profit by it, a vague notion of right to any quantity of the property to which the principle is applied. If these are entitled to an indefinite fraction of others’ property, by parity of reasoning they are entitled to the whole of it ; nor can any question of more or less enter into the merits of their claim. The time may indeed come when the precedent of the Poor Laws will be employed in support of some other scheme which may be proposed, containing, in a still greater measure, the communistic principle ; and when the inexorable argument will be urged, ‘ You have already admitted the principle in your Poor Law, and you cannot now turn round and resist this proposal as containing that principle.’ The Poor Law, in fact, may serve as a Magna Charta of

¹ ‘ Times,’ June 23, 1874.

spoliation, as it is the Magna Charta of improvidence; and its antagonism to national wealth on this, as on other accounts, stands confessed.

The inconsistency of legal relief with public economy is seen also from the consideration that, such relief being really part of the remuneration which is paid for labour, it is given in equal amounts to the skilled and the unskilled worker—to the industrious and the idle; or rather the skilled and the industrious usually obtain less of it than their opposites. Neither is this part of the remuneration of labour equitably levied; for it is levied upon others besides the employers of the remunerated labour. For instance, let there be in a town two manufactories, employing between them three hundred hand-workers. Of these three hundred say that one half, a hundred and fifty, survive to be maintained on parish-rates. They receive each from the rates (say) 4s. a week, that is 600s. = 30*l.* a week, among them, or 1,560*l.* per annum. Of this sum the two master manufacturers pay, according to the rated value of their factories, say 400*l.* per annum; hence, the other rate-payers bear the expense of the remaining 1,160*l.* In other words, the other ratepayers pay this annual sum in supplement of the wages paid by the two employers aforesaid. The same in an agricultural town-parish. There are, say, ten farmers, employing 100 labourers among them. Of these labourers, say that sixty come upon the rates when they are disabled from earning wages. They receive from the parish 4s. each a week;

that is, 12*l.* a week among them, or 624*l.* a year. Of this annual amount the farmers pay, let us suppose, 250*l.* ; hence they leave 374*l.* to be paid annually to their disabled labourers, in practical complement of wages, by the other ratepayers.

From these two instances it appears that one effect of poor-rates is to make others than the employers of labour, in particular industries, pay, in effect, part of the wages of that labour.

That other persons and classes of the community than the employers of labour should be compelled to bear, in effect, a part of the cost of that labour, is surely contrary to all sound doctrines of political economy, and must be detrimental to the wealth of a nation.

No doubt that by the abolition of rates for the supposed 'relief of the poor' a proportionable gain would immediately accrue to owners and occupiers of land, houses, and business premises. This, however, is one of those rare cases in which the gain of one party would not in the event be a loss to the other. At the same time, there would be a solid public gain in the diversion of a large annual sum from unproductive expenditure to the remuneration of productive industry, and the consequent increase of national wealth.

SECTION VI.

EFFECT OF THE POOR LAW ON CLASSES ABOVE.

A FEW remarks shall now be made on the ill effect, in a social point of view, which is wrought by the system of compulsory relief even upon classes not participating in its gratuities. How, indeed, can a system of law injuriously affect one large class of a community without bringing harm upon other classes? The ill effect of the system in question is not confined to wage-earners and paupers, but is extended to other classes by contracting their sympathies in regard to the condition of the real and deserving poor. Political economists have noticed this effect (as they say) in ‘narrowing the hand of private charity.’ This effect of the system will be produced not only on persons in easier circumstances, but still more also on that numerous class of ratepayers who may by an addition to local burdens be reduced from the position of ratepayers to that of consumers of poor-rates. For the weight of the poor-rate ‘falls to a great extent upon the shoulders of persons whose condition is but little removed above that of those to whose relief they are compelled to contribute; and every additional penny which is added to

the burden of local taxation must be the means of bringing upon the rates many of those who were previously living upon the verge of pauperism.’¹ What, then, must be the effect of such taxation in blunting *their* sympathies towards the distressed? What room can it leave them for the voluntary exercise of active benevolence? The poor-tax is paid with grudging, as its proceeds are received without thanks. Compulsory relief is the opposite of ‘the quality of mercy, which is not strained;’ it is the opposite of being ‘twice blessed;’ it has the opposite effect to that of ‘blessing him that gives and him that takes;’ for it contracts the heart of the givers, and tends to the detriment of the receivers. Even among the classes themselves who look to this relief in their need, the accessibility of it, superseding the necessity of mutual neighbourly help, must tend to check that reciprocation of kindly feelings which is fostered by the interchange of good offices. A legal refuge in ‘the parish’ being open to them all, those who might help their fellows in distress would be inclined to leave them to that resource, while those who needed help would prefer demanding it as a right from the parish to soliciting it as a favour from their neighbours. But upon the well-to-do classes the effects of this system of legal relief are manifest in furnishing them with an escape from the trouble of caring for the poor in their respective neighbourhoods, and in favouring the propensity of the rich to ‘hide themselves from

¹ Mr. Wodehouse’s Report for 1871-2.

their own flesh,' to shun sights and recitals of suffering as disturbing to the smooth flow of their own sensations. There being a public fund annually provided for distress, a fund to which they themselves are compelled to contribute their quota, they are prone to leave the distressed to the official dispensers of it, to Boards of Guardians and Relieving Officers. With ratepayers not of the wealthier order the ready answer to applications, however well-grounded, of their poorer neighbours would be : ' Go to the parish—we pay poor-rates for the like of you already.' By the forced payment of relief-rates the churlishly-disposed who contribute to those rates have an excuse given them for their illiberality, and are sheltered from the feeling of shame at displaying it. And it is a well-known characteristic of most men that they will often give cheerfully what they would grudge to part with on compulsion. Nor should it be forgotten that the demoralized character stamped on the lower grades by the inveterate usages of pauperism, tends much to alienate from them the sympathies of the more prosperous. When these see well-paid earners of wages squandering their wages, as under the influence of the Poor Law they do squander them, in mere self-indulgence, to the neglect of their families and their kinsfolk, they are necessarily more inclined to listen with coldness or incredulity to tales of distress, and to ascribe it to the improvidence which has taken no thought of the adverse contingencies of the future. ' They have eaten

and drunk away their wages; and now that they are in want they come to us to relieve them.' Such is the sentiment necessarily engendered in the minds of the more prosperous by the spectacle of the improvident habits of self-indulgence generated by the Poor Law. These habits, I repeat, are chiefly chargeable upon the law. Our improvident people only act as probably ninety-nine men out of every hundred would act in the same circumstances. Circumstances form the character and habits of most men, as a particular mould gives its form to the clay which is cast in it. Circumstances, created by Acts of Parliament, have formed the character and habits of the English hand-working population for improvidence, and must begin to operate on them in early youth so soon as they begin to realise their position and prospects in the world. Hence, as a preponderating majority of mankind would act in the circumstances, they act, in neglecting to make a provision for themselves, when a provision, inadequate though it be, has been made for them already. They prefer in prospect a pittance from the parish to a decent maintenance secured by their own exertions; though doubtless, when they find themselves at last reduced to that pittance, they may be dissatisfied with its amount. But, if they act with this calculated improvidence, it is not to be expected that the better-to-do class of persons will be forward to succour them in the time of their distress. Nor can the justness of the refusal of such succour be reasonably called in question in many cases,

since no man can have a right to squander his means in the superfluities of life, and then call upon others to find him in its necessities. What, however, shall we say of that system of law which naturally tends to close the hearts and hands of the wealthier towards the poorer members of the community?

Poor Law, according to the observation of an eminent expert in its administration, 'not only dries up the sources of humanity, but keeps the rich and the poor apart. Under its influence, Christian charity has become paralysed by long disuse.' Abnormal and mischievous legislation, leading the richer to throw their social responsibilities, as it leads the poorer to throw their natural duties, and, often, themselves also, upon 'the parish'!

SECTION VII.

STEPS IN ABOLITION AND REMEDIAL MEASURES.

SUCH, then, are Poor Laws in their effects on different classes, and on the community as a whole. The amplest and most authentic testimony, the experience of ages and daily observation, all seem to show that such laws are detrimental to the material interests and the good qualities of the most numerous class, and to the general welfare. Compulsory Poor Laws, aggravating the poverty they were designed to remedy, and bringing in worse evils besides, seem, in fact, to be a remarkable instance of the folly of contending with the laws of nature and Providence by which human society is governed, and which, even with the partial suffering they permit, are still the wisest!

Our Poor Laws are products of the same short-sighted kind of policy with that of those laws which attempted to regulate the natural supply of food to a nation, and were supposed to be beneficial to it by keeping up the price of food within it. It is long before men will recognise the limits within which alone the interference of laws can be of benefit to society, and learn to practise in the right place 'a wise and salutary neglect, a judicious letting alone.' 'Unhappily,' as it

has been well observed, 'no knowledge is so rare as the knowledge when to do nothing. It requires an acquaintance with general principles, a confidence in their truth, and a patience of the gradual process by which obstacles are steadily but slowly surmounted, which are among the last acquisitions of political science and experience.'¹

There are, however, those who seem to speak of compulsive relief as a matter of 'inalienable right.' Yet surely the same authority which gratuitously instituted this form of relief has the right to discontinue it. That authority, indeed, would be exercising its right with too great strictness in ceasing to grant maintenance to impotent individuals, who, being without friends to help them and having made no provision for themselves, have been in the habit of receiving this grant; but no injustice would be done to others at least, if no maintenance of this kind were granted to them in the future. Poor Laws involve no social right, only a question of expediency. Had they involved any such right, then in all *pre-Poor Law* ages in all countries, and at the present day in all countries devoid of Poor Laws, a great and universal wrong has been done in the mere non-enactment of such laws! One cannot but think that those persons who import any question of right into the consideration of pauper-relief have not sufficiently attended to the distinction between the claims of right and the claims upon benevolence.

The chief defence of the system of compulsory relief

¹ Report of Poor Law Commissioners, 1834.

is placed on the ground of benevolence, and is summed up in the sentiment of supposed benevolence, 'the poor must not starve.' But your laws *make* people poor. 'Prevention is better than cure;' but here you multiply an evil and then attempt to remedy it. But your remedy fails, for as a matter of fact there is as much starvation under our Poor Laws as in countries where there are no such laws. 'It will be found,' says Professor Fawcett,¹ 'that in France and Prussia there are no Poor Laws similar to ours, and these countries show that it is not necessary to have a Poor Law to prevent widespread starvation. In London, in proportion to the population, as many die from want and starvation as in Paris or Berlin. At every returning Christmas,' continues the Professor, 'the newspapers are filled with accounts of those who are suffering the horrors of starvation, the public is entreated to relieve cases of pressing necessity. Does not all this conclusively prove that our Poor Law system fails to reach thousands who most need assistance?' It may be added, that at all seasons of the year paragraphs appear in the newspapers headed 'Deaths from destitution,' 'Deaths from starvation.' From such paragraphs it would appear that reluctance, or inability, or neglect to apply for relief, or, as sometimes happens, the consumption of relief, when obtained, in drink instead of food, renders Poor Law inoperative to prevent starvation in particular cases.

¹ 'Lectures on Political Economy,' p. 568.

Johnson, speaking in the year 1779 with reference to the state of the poor in London, relates as follows : ‘Saunders Welch the Justice, who was once High Constable of Holborn, and had the best opportunities of knowing the state of the poor, told me that I underrated the number when I computed that twenty a week, that is, above a thousand a year, died of hunger, not absolutely of immediate hunger, but of the wasting and other diseases which are the consequences of hunger.’ At the time in question there were, we know, Poor Laws in force ; nor is there any reason to suppose that in proportion to the population there were fewer persons in receipt of parish money. Whatever may be the number of cases of starvation in the London of the present day, it may be conjectured that the percentage of such cases is not smaller than it was a hundred years ago. Thus apparently futile is the effect of Poor Laws in the prevention of starvation !

In truth, it would seem as though mortality, from whatever cause, were governed by a ‘law of averages,’ such as that by which a certain number of people are every year run over by vehicles in the crowded thoroughfares of a large city like London. Poor Laws may and do cause a great amount of poverty, distress, destitution, misery, and, as a consequence of these, sometimes starvation ; but the prevention of starvation, as of disease and other ills to which flesh is heir, is beyond the power of any human contrivance. The few self-respecting poor, the deserving poor, who are

reluctant to display their miseries and to become pensioners on forced contributions, this is a description of poor who are most likely to starve under our system of 'relieving' the poor. On such falls the real cruelty of the pseudo-philanthropy of compulsory relief. Such starve unknown in silence, while the shameless, the reckless, the clamorous, boldly urge their claims to be supported at the public expense. 'The poor must not starve,' nor will they, if they use the proper means to prevent starvation, or, failing those means—a rare case—if their better-to-do relatives and friends do their duty in supporting them, or their richer neighbours from motives of benevolence and Christian charity give them aid. The percentage of those who from causes out of their own control are in danger of starvation is, by the general testimony of those who have studied the matter—nay, as we may argue from the beneficence of Divine Providence in the constitution of human society—small indeed. Hence their relief is quite within the power of their more fortunate relatives and friends, or of natural benevolence and Christian charity. The benevolence of those who would have them relieved at the general expense, and particularly at the expense of the hard-pressed poorer ratepayers, is a cheap benevolence. It is the well-known story, 'A sees B in distress, and wishes the rest of the alphabet to relieve him.'

The fear of starvation is the motive which since the primal curse sets the whole world in motion, and operates not only as the great stimulus to exertion, but

as a stern monitor against folly and vice. Man in passing through life has by some one been compared to a wilful donkey, which must be kept by blows and curbs from loitering or deviating from its path ! Poverty in its every form is among the penalties by which, or by the fear of which, he is kept moving on the right road. But the Poor Law says that poverty in its worst form, that of starvation, shall not occur. Yet it cannot prevent its occurrence, for numbers actually starve under the Poor Law from desperation, from recklessness, from the stubborn pride which refuses indoor maintenance, and from the love of drink, which turns outdoor relief into means of self-indulgence. In fact, the Poor Law promises vice and folly immunity from their consequences, saying to them, ‘Ye shall not surely starve ;’ and well-known facts prove that in many cases the promise is a deception.

Scriptural authority has indeed been appealed to in favour of Poor Law relief. We are reminded, on this point, of the texts inculcating beneficence, and particularly of the words in the Sermon on the Mount, ‘Give to him that asketh of thee.’ It may, however, be observed, that such Scriptural precepts are irrelevant to the question, as they relate exclusively to voluntary beneficence, not to compulsory contribution ; relate, in fact, to ‘giving,’ whereas Poor Law relief is a case of *taking away*. The application of these precepts to the economy of private bounty is foreign to the subject before us, and will not therefore here be considered.

To these arguments from benevolence may justly be opposed the dictum of no political economist, but of one whose philanthropy in its highest sense cannot be called in question: 'If a man will not work, neither shall he eat.' That he would equally reprobate those who work indeed, but care to lay by nothing of the produce of their work, may be gathered from his words: 'If any man provide not (exercise no forethought) for his own, specially them of his own house, he has denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel.' And with regard to the children and grandchildren of widows, it is his precept that they 'first learn to be duteous at their own home and to requite their progenitors.'¹ But the language of our Poor Laws and of their well-meaning defenders is, 'a man need not work, and yet he shall eat,'—he need 'not lay by, and yet he shall not starve,'—he need 'exercise no forethought for his own, not even for those of his own house,' nor need sons or daughters requite their parents in distress.

The greater part of the poverty which abounds in this wealthy, prosperous, and charitable community is the fruit of the Poor Laws, those very laws for which the argument is used—'the poor must not starve.' The idle, the dishonest, the disorderly, the wasteful, the improvident, the profligate, the drunkard, whenever

¹ Εἰ δέ τις χήρα τέκνα ἢ ἑκγόνα ἔχει μαρτανέτωσαν πρῶτον τὸν ἴδιον οἶκον εὐσεβεῖν καὶ ἀμοιβὰς ἀποδιδόραι τοῖς προγόνοις.—
1 Tim. v. 4.

they look forward in life, see in their mind's eye the distant refuge of the workhouse or out-of-doors relief. 'At the worst,' such characters think, 'they cannot starve, let the worst come to the worst;' and such characters are only too prone to brave the worst. No wonder that such persons suffer poverty, and sometimes starve. They will sometimes spend their parish relief in drink, and starve though relieved; on which occasions a loud outcry will probably be raised against the parish authorities. The prevention of poverty is surely better than the remedy; but here we have a pretended remedy which immeasurably aggravates the disease.

Those persons who, on the supposed ground of benevolence, advocate the system of maintenance by law, as though it were necessary to the subsistence of its subjects, seem, in effect, to regard them as children, naturally incapable of looking forward and making provision for their future in life. Are, then, those who take this view wholly unable to put themselves mentally into the position of these classes, so as to realise in them also the same faculty of forethought which they themselves possess? They will, indeed, recognise in them the faculty of forethought with regard to the concerns of a future state, and yet implicitly deny them the possession of that faculty with regard to the concerns of the present brief stage of existence. Doubtless, by practically treating these classes as children, Poor Laws and their advocates go some way towards making them

‘grown-up children,’ towards stunting in their minds man’s great faculty of ‘looking before,’ and towards inducing in them a corresponding carelessness of the future ; but this childish improvidence, thus induced, is only another instance of the mischievous operation of these laws on the minds of those whom they affect.

Benevolence in the Poor Law system ! Surely, there is real cruelty on a large scale in a system which tends to make and to keep a great portion of a population poor, abject, and helpless—cruelty in holding out to them all its seductive temptations to sloth, reckless self-indulgence, intemperance, and immorality. A shortsighted and ‘weak-kneed’ benevolence may advocate the continuance of such a law ; but a far-seeing and robust benevolence would surely seek its abrogation.

Such benevolence, no less than political enlightenment, would, as it is here contended, lead to the abrogation of all compulsory relief. Its sudden abrogation, however, would on all sides be regarded as inexpedient and impracticable. Pauperism has become so ingrained by tradition into the minds of a large portion of the population, their habits have been so much formed by its practices, that the laws which have engendered it cannot be hastily swept away. The wages-earning class, together with the rest of the community, must doubtless for some time go on suffering in a degree the consequences of a lengthened course of false legislation. That aversion to change, to which

Burke has ascribed the stability of our institutions, forbids any abrupt and sweeping abolition of a long-established system of law, affecting the interests of a large part of the community, however it be proved by experience to be mischievous in operation, or condemned by political science as wrong in principle. The system of our Poor Laws is no doubt the Magna Charta of improvidence ; but even such a Magna Charta cannot be rescinded in a day, however imaginary the right to which it gives a supposed claim. But a gradual abolition of the system, accompanied with remedial measures, would apparently be free from rational objection, until the wages-earning population, who have been treated as children, and taught to think and act as children, by this species of legislation, have been trained to dispense with the pap-boat of Poor Laws and to feed themselves ! So far ago as fifty-seven years the necessity of abolishing Poor Laws was acknowledged by persons of intelligence, including the late Rev. Sydney Smith, who, in a number of the 'Edinburgh Review' for 1819, thus expressed himself on the subject : 'There are two points which we consider as now admitted by all men of sense ; first, that the Poor Laws must be abolished ; secondly, that they must be very gradually abolished.' And the same writer continues, in language applicable, with some abatement, to the present state of the law : 'With respect to the gradual abolition, it must be observed that the present redundant population of the country has been

entirely produced by the Poor Laws, and nothing could be so grossly unjust as to encourage people to such a vicious multiplication, and then, when you happen to discover your folly, immediately to starve them into annihilation. You have been calling upon your population for two hundred years to beget more children; taught them to lay up nothing for matrimony, nothing for children, nothing for age [sickness or non-employment], but to depend upon justices of the peace for every human want. The folly is now detected; but the people who are the fruit of it remain. It was madness to call them into existence; but it would be the height of cold-blooded cruelty to get rid of them by any other than the most gradual and gentle means.' Few, perhaps, who have paid attention to the subject will be disposed to differ with this eminent writer as to the necessity of the abolition of Poor Laws, and the necessity of their gradual abolition.

There are, however, advocates of Poor Laws who seem to hold the opinion that disabled hand-workers, though they have been duly in receipt of their stipulated wages, still have some unsettled claim on 'the country' or on 'society.' They are therefore, according to this opinion, entitled to public support when they can no longer work. It seems that 'the country' or 'society' have had the best of their strength in their health and youth, and is therefore bound to maintain them in sickness or old age. In this picture the British hand-worker is in fact made to *pose* as a patriot, whose

energies have been exhausted in the service of his country, and who thus has established a claim on its gratitude. Let us suppose a hard-worked barrister, depending on his profession, who had spent all his income as he made it, claiming, when disabled from work, a maintenance at the public cost on the ground of his 'public services.' 'The "country,"' he might say, 'or "society" have had the best of my intellectual strength, &c.' Would such a claim be allowed? Yet the mechanic or miner, when he was earning his wages, was no more laying his country under an obligation than was the barrister when he was earning his fees. Each was paid for his work, and there his claim ended. The idea that the disabled wages-earner is still a creditor on some party is alarming by its capability of indefinite extension, so that no one hiring service of any kind would know when his liabilities ended. Surely, however, in all common sense, the payment of stipulated hire precludes all further claims to remuneration, whether from private sources or public funds.

But there is an argument in favour of the retention of Poor Laws in a partial form which requires to be noticed, chiefly from the weight of the authority with which it has been propounded. In his 'Lectures on Pauperism,' at pages 50-56, Professor Fawcett reasons from the mischievous operation of individual almsgiving and of charitable endowments in favour of the retention of Poor Laws, though exclusively of the dis-

astrous practice of outdoor relief. In the Professor's view, the facts which he adduces, to use his own words, 'conclusively prove that it would be extremely mischievous still further to encourage the foundation of charitable endowments, or more powerfully to stimulate indiscriminating almsgiving. It is, however, absolutely certain that both these effects would follow if the Poor Law were entirely abolished.' The question then may be reduced to these simple terms: 'Which involves the less evil, providing for the poor by compulsory maintenance, or leaving them to the operation of voluntary charity?' Admitting that harm is often done by voluntary charity, individual or endowed, in the encouragement of improvident habits, the present writer must avow his belief, on grounds now to be stated, that incalculably greater harm is done in this direction by compulsory maintenance. The first ground of his belief is this—that let a system of compulsory maintenance be as carefully constructed as possible, it will be increasingly perverted and abused in practice. In support of this statement he would refer to the acknowledged perversion and abuse which Elizabeth's statute of 1602 underwent in no long time, and to the practical failure of the restricting provisions of the Act of 1834, which contemplated indoor maintenance as the rule, and outdoor relief as the rare exception. How this intention of the Act has been frustrated in practice is a matter of common and regretful observation; the number of paupers throughout the country

receiving outdoor relief is to the number of indoor paupers as five to one, and in some Unions as eight or even more to one. The difficulty of adhering to salutary rules in the administration of compulsory relief is well illustrated by the description which a Poor Law Inspector, Mr. Wodehouse, gives of his conference on the subject with a certain Board of Guardians: ‘At a meeting of a Board which I attended, I took occasion to call their attention to the exceptionally high rate of pauperism in their Union, and to several points which appeared objectionable in their mode of administering relief. A large number of guardians were present, and, in the course of the discussion, one member stated it as his belief that the large majority of the guardians agreed with what I had said, and were prepared to assent to the principles which I had endeavoured to enforce; “but somehow,” he added, “when we come to act as a Board we don’t carry them out.” None of the other guardians expressed any dissent from this statement, and I have no reason to doubt it was correct.’ The fact is, that there are a number of uncontrollable agencies at work which must ensure a greater or less perversion and relaxation of the best constructed and most stringent law of compulsory relief. Fear, favour, indolence, mistaken benevolence at others’ expense, in administrators, will inevitably co-operate with the importunity of applicants to the maladministration of any such law. If, as Professor Fawcett’s view implies, there be a tendency to indiscriminate in the dispensa-

tion of private alms, the tendency is far stronger in the dispensation of public funds. If people are too careless in selecting the objects of their own voluntary benefaction, they are infinitely more careless in selecting objects on whom the forced contributions of the public shall be bestowed. The expectation, therefore, that private charity, when the whole burden of relieving real poverty is thrown upon it, will be judicious, appears more reasonable than the expectation that compulsory aid will be administered in due accordance with law, however carefully devised. In reference, however, to Professor Fawcett's apparent preference, in the above-quoted passage of his 'Lecture on Pauperism,' of compulsory to voluntary relief, we may appeal from the Professor in his Lecture to the Professor in his 'Manual of Political Economy.' At page 359 of that work, he appears to argue for the abolition of compulsory relief. 'Believing,' says he, 'as we do, that the Poor Laws have not only exerted a most baneful influence in the past, but are also at the present time offering a most serious encouragement to improvidence, the question may be asked, "Would it be wise and just to abolish the legal claim to be maintained which every one now has?" To this question it may at once be replied that it would be neither wise nor just to introduce such a fundamental change precipitately. . . The abolition of parochial relief ought to be carried out gradually, and should form a part of a comprehensive scheme of social and economic re-

form.' It can hardly be doubted that the Professor here argues in favour of the abolition of compulsory relief, and therefore, inferentially, in favour of voluntary relief, the only remaining alternative.

But the chief argument in favour of private beneficence as opposed to compulsory aid is that the former is less pauperizing and demoralizing than the latter. Private beneficence must be precarious, compulsory maintenance is assured. Hence, the improvident can only look forward to private beneficence as a probability, while to compulsory aid they can look forward as to a certainty. They can only calculate that they *may* be supported by the one, while they know that they *must* be supported by the other. And this difference between *may* and *must* in the anticipations of the pauperized mind is immeasurable in its results on conduct. The less the probability of relief, the less will be the amount of improvidence; while the certainty of relief is to improvidence a positive encouragement.

This view of the very different nature and effect of Poor Law relief on the one hand and of voluntary relief on the other, is well expressed in the following extract from the official Report of Mr. Longley, a Poor Law Inspector, for the year 1873-4: 'It is indeed the very fact that Poor Law relief may be claimed by the destitute as of right which constitutes the main difference between its administration and that of relief which is charitable, and therefore voluntary. . . Relief given

as of right must tend to encourage improvidence to a greater degree than that which, being a matter not of right but of voluntary, precarious, and intermittent charity, cannot be so surely anticipated as a future resource.' P. 145.

Of the almost mechanical precision with which legal provision against individual adversity of any kind works as an encouragement to improvidence, a noteworthy example has been supplied to the present writer in a letter addressed to him on the subject of the 'prolétariat' in France. The letter shall be quoted in the original language : ' Je puis vous apporter un argument qui prouve jusqu'à quel point peut aller l'insouciance de l'homme quand il sent derrière lui une loi ou même une coutume sur lesquelles lui ou les siens peuvent compter pour l'avenir. Il est arrivé fréquemment que des ouvriers employés dans des fabriques ont été tués ou mutilés au service de leurs patrons. L'ouvrier ou sa famille ont alors droit à une indemnité que jusqu'ici les tribunaux ont largement accordée. Mais voyez la conséquence de cette libéralité des tribunaux. On en est à remarquer dans les différents procès qui se déroulent devant les cours que les ouvriers prennent beaucoup moins de précautions et s'exposent sans nécessité comme s'ils comptaient en cas d'accident sur l'indemnité que le tribunal ne manque pas d'accorder en de telles circonstances. Je tiens ces remarques de——com-mis-greffier à la cour d'appel de——et par conséquent on ne peut être mieux placé pour être bien renseigné à

cet égard. On comprendra facilement que si l'homme raisonne ainsi quand il y va de ses membres, ou de sa vie, il dira beaucoup plus facilement encore, Mangeons, buvons ; quand nous n'aurons plus rien, les lois des pauvres sont là.'

The same gentleman adds his testimony as an impartial observer to the effect of our Poor Laws in creating improvidence : ' Parmi les causes très nombreuses de paupérisme en Angleterre, ne pourrait on compter le défaut de prévoyance engendré d'un coté par *cette arrière pensée, plutôt instinctive que raisonnée*, que, si l'ouvrier vient à manquer, il trouvera des secours qui lui sont dus par la paroisse ou par l'Etat ? '

I would also commend to the attention of those who think that compulsory Poor Laws in any shape are preferable to private benevolence, the following extract from the letter of the same gentleman, accounting for the admitted superiority of the French wages-earning classes over the English in point of prudential parsimony : ' Il y a de l'aveu de tout le monde moins de ces pauvres dont vous parlez en France qu'en Angleterre. Le travailleur épargne plus chez nous que chez vous. Quelle en est la raison ? D'abord nous n'avons pas les lois des pauvres, c'est quelque chose ; l'assistance publique est organisée sur une vaste échelle, mais en aucun cas le nécessaire ne peut s'y considérer comme un droit, chacun par conséquent doit songer à son propre avenir.'

These facts seem to tell powerfully against any system of legal relief.

Again, in comparing the effects of compulsory with the effects of voluntary relief, it should be considered that the latter is the less demoralizing, in that it is received generally with gratitude, whereas the former is received as a matter of course, or even of right.

It would seem, therefore, that, while there can be no perfect system of dealing with collective poverty, the imperfections inherent in the nature of compulsory relief in any form far exceed the imperfections which may attach to private beneficence.

Reverting, then, to the point before us, the abolition of the system in question, the writer would suggest methods for effecting what the late Mr. Sydney Smith termed 'the gradual and gentle abolition of it;' the abolition of it by degrees, and with the accompaniment of remedial measures.

The first step would be the annulment of the outdoor relief of able-bodied paupers, with an exception presently to be stated; and this proceeding would be beneficially accompanied by such a modification of the Settlement Laws as would make one year's unrelieved residence within the limits of a Union a title to 'settlement' in that Union. Some law of settlement, abstractedly impolitic as any law of settlement may be, seems yet a necessary complement of a law of compulsory aid; and, indeed, one wrong step in legislation, as in some other things, seems to induce another

wrong step as necessary to mitigate the consequences of the original error. If relief were given to applicants irrespectively of domiciliation, we should, it is feared, have able-bodied paupers travelling at will over the country and sojourning during pleasure at different Union-houses on the road, making no doubt longer sojourns at those Union-houses at which they met with the more agreeable reception. There would be also the danger that every great centre of industry would attract to itself an excessive number of wages-earners, who, as soon as slackness of work in their particular industry took place, or as they were disabled by any cause from working, would throw themselves on the poor-rates of the locality; or that the doles of endowed charities would attract a still greater number of aspirants than they now attract, augmenting in the particular places a mass of pauperism of the worst form. But any law of settlement must carry with it this great evil, that it hinders in a measure, greater or less according to the exigency of the terms of settlement, the free circulation of labour, precluding in such measure the honest worker from carrying his valuable commodity to the best market, making labour scarce and dear in one place, over-abundant and cheap in another place; causing a congestion of population in one part of the body of the nation, and a tenuity of population in another part. Adam Smith, in his 'Wealth of Nations,' asserted, says Professor Fawcett, that there was probably no artisan of forty years of age who had not suffered

from the law of settlement.¹ So long, however, as we have a system of compulsory 'relief,' we must, it is argued, have some law of settlement; and the usual compromise, so called, between having something and not having it at all—viz., having a little of it—would in this case seem the best expedient. If settlement were made comparatively easy, it might still act as some discouragement to idle vagrancy as well as to the undue agglomeration of population around centres of industry or seats of endowed charity, while it would be some encouragement also to the enterprising change of abode in quest of remunerative employment.

It is, indeed, argued that the total abolition of Settlement Laws would be expedient if effected conjointly with the abolition of outdoor relief; and in support of this argument the case of Ireland is adduced, where scarcely any outdoor relief is granted, and no laws of settlement exist. In that country, it is stated, no inconvenience arises from the aggregation of masses, as the offer of the workhouse is found to be a sufficient check to the augmentation of pauperism in great centres. The conclusion from this fact would be in favour of the abolition of settlement, if conjoined with the abolition of outdoor relief, since the whole law of settlement is by the premises chiefly of use as a check upon the practice of that species of relief. If not the abolition, at least the modifica-

¹ 'Manual of Political Economy.' 'The Poor Law and its Influence on Pauperism.'

tion, of the Settlement Laws seems expedient as an appendage to the cessation of out-relief to able-bodied paupers.

The exception, hinted at above, to the entire and immediate abolition of out-relief to the able-bodied would consist in the more frequent practice of the wise provision of the Act of 1834, authorising relief in the way of loan, at the discretion of the guardians. This method of relief would not have the pauperizing effect on the recipient which is produced by the granting of parish doles; while the attachment of his future wages, under the authority of the same Act, for the gradual repayment of the relief received, would give a *bonâ fide* character to the transaction on both sides. It cannot be doubted that legal loan-relief may be worked with the same success as attends the operations of various existing loan-societies. Indeed it is found to succeed completely in several Unions already.

Again, as a step towards the abolition of out-relief, and ultimately of all forced relief, it would appear necessary to limit to an admission into the workhouse the public maintenance of illegitimate children, for whose support the mothers themselves cannot find means, nor the fathers be compelled to provide. Experience, in Scotland as well as in England, has clearly shown that the administration of out-relief in this case not only removes that restraint upon unchastity which is furnished by the prospect of the burden of

maintaining the offspring, but also gives a direct encouragement and boon to this vice. A resident landowner in Scotland has supplied the following account of the tendency of outdoor relief to promote unchastity: 'I was one day in our soup-kitchen, temporarily established, during a severe winter, for the benefit of the poor of a town in Scotland. Observing one young woman receive an unduly large portion, I asked her for an explanation. This was given in broad Scotch, with the utmost *sang froid*, and without shame or remorse. She said she had four children, and was unmarried; that in her trade (!) one or two children did not answer, it was the many that paid, as for each child she got 2s. 6d. a week. She was therefore receiving 2l. a month, or 24l. a year; while honest hard-working mothers of families could scarcely earn half this sum. In Scotland such cases are found by thousands and tens of thousands.'¹ Surely it were on all accounts better that the children of such mothers were invariably taken into the workhouse.

Meanwhile, to judge by observation and the reports of Poor Law Inspectors, it would seem that, with the view of ensuring greater discrimination in the administration of out-relief, either the present number of relieving officers should be more highly paid, in order that they might be at liberty to devote more time to

¹ The Report of the Registrar-General for 1871, lately published, gives nearly one in ten as the proportion of illegitimate births in Scotland.

their duties, or that the number of these important functionaries should be considerably increased. These officers would then be enabled to exercise a more minute and careful investigation into the circumstances of individual paupers and their near relatives, so as that they might judge of the fitness of each applicant's case, and prevent, as far as possible, the numerous frauds which it appears are now practised in the reception of out-relief.

It may on this point be worthy of consideration whether the salaries of relieving officers might not with advantage be raised, so as to attract men of higher education, and enable them to devote themselves entirely to the duties of the office. In this event the existing number of these officers might suffice; while the services of such men in the mere economy of parochial expenditure might be expected to make up for the increase of salary. In a Union in Ireland, to the excellent management of which the writer can testify from enquiries made on the spot, the services of the Chairman—unpaid, of course—in combining economy with efficiency, are regarded by his colleagues as 'worth a thousand a year' to the ratepayers. A similar value might attach to the services of relieving officers of a more educated grade, whose salaries should render them independent of other employment. Upon the intelligence and activity of these officers the successful working of the Poor Law must in great measure depend; and their comparative inefficiency,

almost inevitable, is, as one at least of the Poor Law Inspectors observes, the weakest point in the machinery by which that law is at present worked.

This measure, together with an increased care and strictness on the part of Boards of Guardians in applying the public money, of which they are but trustees, to the purposes of outdoor relief, would do much towards retrenching this kind of compulsory relief, the kind most liable to abuse, and which has the chief share in the impoverishment and demoralization of the population. The effectual retrenchment of outdoor relief would go far towards checking the spirit of pauperism itself, and, according to the testimony of experts, would thus tend even to diminish the influx of paupers to the workhouse.

The first and greatest step, then; towards the abolition of the system of compulsory relief is the abolition of its worst form, outdoor relief.

How quickly outdoor relief can convert even a thrifty and industrious people into paupers may be judged from its thirty years' working in Scotland. 'Scotland,' says Professor Fawcett, 'affords the most striking proof that a Poor Law must inevitably be mischievous if it permit outdoor relief. There is every reason to anticipate, from the general social character of the Scotch, that less pauperism would be found among them than in any other country: they are proverbially thrifty, intelligent, and prudent; and contrasts have often been drawn between the saving habits

of the Scotch and the spending propensities of the Irish. All *à priori* reasoning would therefore seem to show that there must necessarily be much less pauperism in Scotland than in Ireland. What, however, are the facts? At the present time there are, in proportion to the population, more than three times as many paupers in Scotland as in Ireland; and in the Scotch Highlands there is twelve times as much pauperism as in Ulster and Connaught. These facts, which at first appeared almost incredible, admit a very obvious explanation. In 1845 a new Poor Law was passed for Scotland; from some strange perversity on the part of our legislators, this Act, instead of being modelled upon the Irish Poor Law, gave even greater facilities for the granting of outdoor relief than existed in England. It soon became evident that the Scotch, though naturally prudent and thrifty, became sensibly affected by the demoralizing influence of the new system which had been introduced. An opinion rapidly grew up in many quarters that out-relief was conferred as a gift upon the people, to enable them to do without work. As an evidence of what was taking place, a suggestive complaint came from the fishermen of Wick that they 'could not get their nets made and repaired, for those who had formerly been employed in this work now said that it was far more comfortable for them to obtain a maintenance from the parish. . . . Many who had sums of money in the banks transferred the money to other names, in order that they might

not forfeit their chance of getting something out of the rates.’¹ As regards this last point, it will not be out of place to mention here an experience of the present writer’s, when taking part in the establishment of a Penny Savings Bank for the benefit of the poorer classes in a certain district in England where he was then living. It was found that one chief obstacle to the success of the bank was the unwillingness of many of the population to let the ‘gentry’ know that they had money, lest such knowledge should prejudice their claims to relief.

As to a judicious administration of outdoor relief in the long run, experience has shown its impracticability. Witness the failure of the provisions of the Act of 1834, designed to make indoor maintenance the rule and outdoor relief the rare exception. As in the decisions of Justices of the Peace before the passing of that Act, so in the resolutions of Boards of Guardians since its passing, it has been found that limitary terms, such as ‘emergencies,’ ‘sudden and urgent necessity,’ ‘exceptional cases,’ ‘extreme cases,’ may be stretched so as to include all cases of application for this kind of relief. A further proof, if proof be still needed, of the futility of any attempt to limit duly the administration of outdoor relief is furnished by the breakdown of the Hamburg plan, which, with its accurate organisation, subdivision of districts, and other provisions for ‘strictness and minuteness of investigation

¹ ‘Lectures on Pauperism,’ pp. 30–1.

of cases,' gave the best possible chance of success to this method of relief.¹ In truth, while it is not easy in theory to draw any line below which outdoor relief shall not be granted, in practice it is found impossible to keep above that line. The practice of outdoor relief, in fact, contains within itself a principle of indefinite extension. The discretionary dispensation of public funds on a large scale is seldom continued for any length of time with much regard to the intentions of legislators. Where the pecuniary interests of numbers are concerned in administration, only the plain and positive directions of law have a chance of being faithfully carried into execution; indulgent exceptions will be interpreted with such latitude, that in a short time they will be made to embrace ordinary cases; and a permitted alternative of concession will wholly prevail over the prescribed alternative of strictness. 'The bane of all pauper legislation,' say the Commissioners of 1832, 'has been the legislating for *extreme cases*. Every exception, every violation of the general rule to meet a real case of unusual hardship, lets in a whole class of fraudulent cases, by which that rule must in time be destroyed.' Outdoor relief must either be abused or abolished.

In effecting, however, the abolition of outdoor relief, regard should doubtless be had to what may

¹ 'Report of Poor Laws in Foreign Countries,' p. 31, where it will be seen that the elaborate out-relief system at Hamburg was abandoned on account of the onerous duties which it imposed on its administrators.

be termed the vested interests of those helpless persons who, having no private means of support, and no relatives capable of supporting them, have been accustomed to receive it. A date might be fixed after which no fresh applications for this kind of relief should be granted, so that due warning might be given against future dependence upon it. Meantime no outdoor relief should be granted or continued except in cases of proved helplessness and destitution, and of the inability of relatives to assist.

In the case of strikes, which is a case of self-inflicted distress, all demands for relief are too wanting in any plea of fairness to deserve consideration. Legal relief is surely perverted from its proper purpose when it is used as a kind of 'purchase' in the tug against employers of labour. Remonstrances, no doubt, would be heard, even in this case, against refusal of relief, as affecting the families of the strikers. But what of the interests of the employers and other ratepayers concerned? And is it not a law of nature that the effects of each man's conduct are borne by his family as well as by himself? The argument, too, from the sufferings of wives and children directed against the employers and other ratepayers concerned, tends to the encouragement of strikes, which need no encouragement, whereas it should come home to the strikers themselves, who might fairly be expected as reasonable men, possessed of common natural affection, to consider beforehand the consequences which their act may entail upon their families. Nor

is the misery which strikes bring upon wives and children by any means limited to the wives and children of the strikers. But the Poor Law seems to give free play to selfishness in the exaction of wages as well as to sensuality in the consumption of them.

Among the remedial measures to accompany the gradual abolition of compulsive relief may be mentioned the due regulation of Friendly Societies. 'Friendly Societies,' as Mr. Macdonald, the Parliamentary representative of the wages-earning classes, has observed, 'may be of great use in teaching the people to dispense with the Poor Law.' If, however, such societies are to be of any use in this way, it is obvious that their rules must be framed on sound principles of finance, and administered with intelligence and honesty, so that their members may be assured the relief for which they have stipulated. But it is hopeless to expect that such rules and such an administration of them will be generally secured until these societies are placed under the supervision of Government authority. In a normal state of things, no doubt the management of these societies would be left wholly to the members of them and their own officers. But the notorious ignorance and helplessness of a great part of the rural population, owing in great measure to their habitual dependence on extraneous support, render it necessary for their interests that the constitution and working of these societies should be subject to the oversight of public officials. They must be deprived of the

liberty of ruining themselves! It was stated by an experienced guardian of the poor, representative at a recent Poor Law Conference, that 'a great many of these Friendly Societies are not worth ten years' purchase, some may be worth fifteen years', and others twenty years' purchase. I have seen,' adds this speaker, 'two or three Friendly Societies broken up in my own village, and after men have subscribed twenty years to them they have been thrown upon the parish.' In point of fact, cases constantly occur everywhere of the collapse of these societies, and of consequent loss and disappointment to their members. Either the rules are framed without due regard to the proportion which the number of the members, or the amount of their several contributions, bears to the amount of relief promised; or those to whom the funds are entrusted prove unworthy of the trust; or, which is not an uncommon case, the younger members of a society of this kind, forming a majority, break up the society, and, as the phrase is, 'divide the box' equally with the older members, to the manifest injury of the latter. Irregularities like these, fatal to the realisation of the relief promised, fatal also to the efficiency of these societies as means of 'educating' the wages-earning classes in self-reliance, can be prevented only by the compulsory interference of Government authority in settling their rules and in securing the due administration of their affairs. Of course the Poor Law system itself is the most formidable antagonist to the success

of these societies, or of any expedient which would prepare the mass to dispense with that system. It has created a habit of dependence on itself which is hostile to all methods of self-dependence, and therefore to its own abolition. The Poor Law is thus regarded as the best Benefit Society, because everything is taken out and nothing put in. Even in Scotland, the Report of the Friendly Societies Commission tells us, 'there is a growing class who feel that they need not insure in any Friendly Society, as the Poor Law provides them with a certainty of sick pay.' Hence these societies, even when placed on a sound basis, will not be duly efficacious in teaching self-help until the prospect is opened of an abolition of Poor Law help. With a view, however, to that consummation, they deserve the fullest encouragement and require the positive protection of compulsory law.¹

An important remedial measure with a view to dispauperization is offered by the Act for facilitating the purchase of small annuities and for assuring payments after death. Its provisions may be briefly described as assuring, on the payment of a monthly premium, an annuity which the wages-earner shall

¹ For further information on the subject of Friendly Societies, the reader is referred to the Paper upon it and the ensuing discussion, given in the 'Report of the Poor Law Conference' of the South-Eastern District, held in October 1875. Reports of the several Conferences of this kind which took place in that year have been published in one volume, by Messrs. Knight & Co., Fleet Street.

begin to receive at the age of fifty-five years, or a sum not exceeding 100*l.* payable on his death.¹ It would be necessary, in order that this Act should operate duly towards dispauperization, that its provisions should be more widely made known by means which the Government could without difficulty employ. A country clergyman, with whom the writer is acquainted, had some success in recommending these annuities to the attention of his parishioners; and it might be hoped that, were the plan of them brought more generally under the notice of the class for whose benefit it was intended, they would take more frequent advantage of it. No doubt in this, as in other instances, the Poor Law itself crops up as the great obstacle to any remedial measures proposed to aid in its abolition. This great enemy to all self-help, with its pauperizing provision against the adverse contingencies of life, has the effect of paralysing all efforts, like that of the above-mentioned Act, to assist wages-earners in making provision for themselves against the time when failing strength shall compel them to leave off work. Poor Law, in short, obviates all measures for neutralising its own ill effects.

In the present instance its adverse operation would be as thus: A, while in the receipt of wages, has, through many years, exercised some self-denial in paying his monthly premium towards this annuity, and has

¹ The tables for these annuities and insurances can be obtained at any post-office.

begun to reap the benefit of his providence ; but B, who saved nothing from wages of no less amount, receives a weekly allowance from the parish equal in amount to the weekly produce of A's annuity. A young wages-earner sees that A is practically no better off for his provident conduct than the improvident B, and only too naturally declines to put in for the annuity. Nothing, in fact, but the prospect of the abolition of outdoor relief, and ultimately of all Poor Law relief, will ensure any extensive adoption of this method of small annuities ; while the effect of such an adoption of it would be to prepare the way for the abolition of that kind of relief.

Among measures that may tend to ' educate ' the hand-working classes to self-reliance, instead of *parish-reliance*, may be mentioned again a form of relief sanctioned by the Poor Law, but seldom brought into practice—relief by way of loan. This form of help might obviously often save a self-respecting poor man from becoming a pauper. It is, as the present writer has been informed, the only form in which legal relief is granted among the industrious and thrifty wages-earning population of Holland. It has been objected, indeed, that the loans would often not be repaid, and, what upon this supposition would be perfectly true, that more moral harm would thus be done than by the practice of gift-relief. The objection, however, will not hold good if due discretion be used with regard to the particular persons to whom loans should be made,

and if repayment be duly enforced. That the practice of loan-relief is not liable to the aforesaid objection appears from occasional statements of Guardians, from among which shall be cited the following significant statement of the Guardian of a large parish, representative at a recent Poor Law Conference. 'As to relief by loans,' said this gentleman, 'we have given a great deal of money in that way and we have always got it back, until just at the present time we were obliged to prosecute in the case of a man who would not pay, but has plenty of money. We put him in the County Court, and got an order that he was to pay in a month. This is the only case we have had where we were in any danger of losing money lent on loan.'¹

It may be observed that this form of relief would have a dispauperizing effect in bringing home to the mind of the recipient some sense at least of due obligation for the aid of his neighbours. It would militate less than gift-relief against his honest self-respect; for when the debt had been paid he would feel that he had done all that was justly required of him. Even in the case of relief by gift there have been a few instances known of recipients who afterwards, in more prosperous circumstances, have honourably repaid to the parish the amount of relief which they had received from it. But the practice of loan-relief would effectually remind the recipients that the help of others is truly a favour and not a right; and thus, as well as by aiding

¹ Speech of Rev. E. Hawley, at Leicester, November 24, 1875.

them to help themselves, it would be a step in the direction of dispauperization.

There can be no doubt that the way to dispauperization would be greatly facilitated by the due enforcement of another provision of the Poor Law itself, requiring the maintenance of poor relations in the direct line. Not only is this requirement all but universal in the Poor Laws of continental countries, but in some of those countries it extends to relatives in the collateral line; and in all of them it seems to be rigidly enforced. In France the maintenance by relatives in the direct line is provided for by several Articles in the Civil Code;¹ and the present writer has been informed that this provision of law is so clear a reflection of public sentiment, as that it is by no means uncommon for persons of the humbler class to postpone marriage to the maintenance of indigent parents. When the duty of supporting poor relations has come to be generally practised in England, pauperism will be much reduced, and provident habits will be far more prevalent than they are at the present moment.

There are not a few who think that the 'gradual and gentle' transition from a state of dependence on the parish to a state of manly self-dependence would be aided by enabling the agricultural labourers in still greater numbers than is now the case to rent, or, if they will save sufficient means from their wages, to purchase at their market value, plots of ground which

¹ 'Report on Foreign Poor Laws,' pp. 162-3.

they would cultivate in their now more numerous spare hours. The French correspondent whose letter has been quoted in the preceding pages, states that the more frugal habits of the French peasantry are owing, not only to the absence of Poor Laws, but also to their very general desire to become possessors of small portions of the soil ; and he suggests that were greater facilities for this purpose given to the English agricultural labourers, it would tend to encourage in them also the formation of habits of prudential economy. The practice of letting allotments to these labourers is by no means uncommon, and is found to have its effect in dispauperizing the allottees. And probably, if the owners of land, who as a body show much kindly interest in the condition of their less prosperous neighbours, would give increased facilities for the renting or even the purchase of such parcels of their ground, they would be paving the way still more towards the liberation of that class from their demoralizing, pauperizing, enfeebling, and in truth poverty-creating dependence on a maintenance abstracted by law from the substance of other classes, and to a very considerable extent from that of a class only just outside of the verge of pauperism ; nay, and *in effect*, from the substance of the more provident members of their own class. An increase in the numerical extent of peasant proprietorship might contribute to restore a healthier state of things in rural districts. How is it that the term 'peasantry of England' sounds strange in our

ears, and that the rural population of the lower class are now only known as 'labourers' and 'paupers'? This suggestive change of nomenclature is, perhaps, owing to the fact that from being to a considerable extent proprietors, often in the form of copyholders, of their tenements, with portions of land attached, or, as they were called in feudal language, 'villeins regar-dant,' they have all descended to the position of mere tenants-at-will of their cottages. Although it be the pleasing fiction of a poet that—

There was a time, e'er England's woes began,
When every rood of ground maintained its man,

yet it is no fiction that there was a time when a large proportion of the rural population held land in small portions. A writer in the 'Quarterly Review' of July 1875,¹ speaks of the time as 'not over-distant' when 'nine-tenths, or rather nineteen-twentieths, of cultivated England were nothing more than an aggregate of small estates and farms, mostly the former. Even in the latter half of the seventeenth century not less than a hundred and sixty thousand proprietors, says Lord Macaulay, who with their families must have made up more than a seventh of the population, derived their substance from little freehold estates.' Hence then, two centuries ago—that is, in the reign of Charles II.—more than one in seven of the heads of families in England were in possession of land. The coalition of these small properties into larger estates

¹ Article 'Jamaica.'

and great territories was, no doubt, owing in part to that 'attraction of gravitation' which operates with regard to all property, and by which the larger mass draws to it the smaller bodies around it. It is, however, at least a probable conjecture that this agglomeration of small properties into territorial possessions was accelerated by the operation of the Poor Law system in destroying the independent spirit of the peasantry and disposing them to sell, for tempting sums of hard cash, their interests in the soil to those moneyed men who desired to 'add field to field and house to house.' The money would soon be gone, and the descendants of the sellers would be left as mere tenants-at-will of their cottages, 'labourers,' looking in case of necessity to poor-rates for succour. In fact, this class would obtain in exchange for their small proprietorships a money price, plus the legal right to be provided for at the gratuitous expense of other people; for while they were owners they could not be paupers. Whether, however, the general absorption of peasant properties into larger estates be in a degree attributable to the demoralizing temptation of Poor Law relief, yet some return is being made to the earlier state of things, in regard to the possession of an interest in the soil on the part of a larger proportion of the hand-working people, by means of the Freehold Land and Building Societies, and through an increased willingness on the part of landed proprietors to let, if not to sell, small plots of ground to cottagers. The progress of this movement

may be looked to for aid in elevating the material and social condition of these classes, and thus for softening the transition which shall throw them on their own resources for self-support.

It is notorious how largely up to a recent period the country people have parted with their valuable 'common rights' for sums of money, which naturally would soon melt in their hands. The common rights which have been sold cannot of course be recovered; but it seems much to be desired, in counteraction of pauperism, that these rights should cease to be purchased. The following considerations, as stated by an able journalist, tell powerfully in favour of the preservation of the still remaining common rights. Speaking of the 'effects of the enclosures on the class whose rights in commons have been extinguished,' the writer continues: 'It is difficult to say that these effects have been satisfactory. The money paid in compensation has soon been spent, the allotments have been found too small or too barren to yield their owners much profit, and in the meantime the owners have lost the sense of *quasi-possession* which the right of pasture gave them, and have lost, too, the *motive for thrift* afforded by the prospect of feeding a cow for nothing, provided they could get together the money to buy one. In these and other ways the condition of the most poor, *as a class*, has been changed for the worse by the wholesale enclosure of commons, even though the interests of the particular members of the class whose

rights have been extinguished may have been saved.’¹ However, by thrift like that of the French and Belgian peasantry, our country people in receipt of good wages may to a considerable extent accumulate sums sufficient to regain in other forms an interest in the soil, which would aid in inspiring them with an independence of pauper relief, and in enabling them to dispense with it. To the agricultural labourer, and often also to the artisan, the purchase of a cottage or of a plot of ground, if still more frequent opportunities were given for such an investment of his savings, would be an object of legitimate ambition, tending to elevate his sense of self-respect and his position in the social scale.

State emigration has often been suggested as a means of drawing off a surplus of population, to the benefit of themselves and of those who remained in the country. Some political economists, however, including Professor Fawcett, have objected to State emigration, as ‘having the same inherent vice as the Poor Laws, discouraging providence, encouraging improvidence, and taxing the prudent in order to give help to the imprudent.’² It would, as he observes, in effect, unfairly place the improvident who might emigrate at the public expense, on a level with the provident who might be willing to emigrate at their own expense. But, as it is, we unfortunately have the Poor Laws in full swing amongst us ; and with the view of

¹ ‘Pall Mall Gazette,’ February 12, 1876.

² ‘Lectures on Pauperism,’ p. 58.

getting rid of these laws it might be expedient to turn their very principle against their continuance, and assist able-bodied paupers to emigrate in order to dispauperize those who remain behind. We shall think it too late to object to State emigration as a boon to improvidence, if we consider the boons which we offer it at home. It seems to be, indeed, straining at a gnat and swallowing a camel to maintain the improvident here, and yet to boggle at State emigration as encouraging improvidence. In a purely economical point of view it would be expedient to assist paupers to emigrate instead of continuing to maintain them in the country. By the co-operation of our Poor Laws and our Settlement Laws, we have caused a redundancy of population in particular localities; what more obvious course than to reduce this redundancy by subsidising its emigration? To the objection that this were to encourage improvidence, it may be a satisfactory answer that by our laws we have created this improvidence, and that we ought to take steps to remedy its consequence in a mass of pauperism. The colonies need labour, and some of our able-bodied labourers need permanent employment; why not aid in bringing the two parties together, in giving to the demand its supply? The Government, acting in concert with Boards of Guardians, might establish in localities, where there is a known and acknowledged surplusage of labour, a machinery for emigration; and to the able-bodied applicants for relief a free pass might be offered to some

colony where labour is wanted, and is consequently well remunerated. Some of the Colonial States themselves have assisted in defraying the expense of this profitable emigration to their own shores ; and it is not improbable that they would be found willing to co-operate still more largely in any well-organised Government scheme for the same purpose. Such a scheme, indeed, except it form part of a plan for the extinction of compulsory relief, is fatally open to all Professor Fawcett's objections. But its operation, as a remedial and auxiliary measure directed towards that object, would apparently facilitate its attainment, and aid in rendering less harsh and abrupt the transition of the population from a dependence on the public to dependence on themselves.

Meantime the improved education of the rising generation may be looked to—certainly it ought to be capable of being looked to—as means of improving their practical notions, of preparing them to exercise due self-restraint and rational forethought, and of disciplining them to meet the realities of life. Any education, worth the epithet of ‘good,’ of the wages-earning people would be such as should implant in them some correct notions of the duty which they owe to society in this matter. In any system of primary education fitted to the wants of the age it would be made one of the express objects to instil these notions into their minds, and to teach them to look forward to the time when they will have to put them into practice ; when, like real men,

they will have to depend upon themselves, under Providence, for success in the arduous, but hopeful and bracing, conflict with circumstances. No scheme of national education can be thought complete unless it include education in sentiments and practical notions, as well as in intellectual quickness and attainment. If it be the business of education to teach children what they are to be and do when they become men, it ought in this case not merely to teach them to read, to write, and to sum, but to inspire them, among other sentiments, with that of a true manliness, which would seek to be beholden to others for no means of subsistence which self-help could obtain. To this point is the following observation of a Poor Law Inspector, Dr. Clutterbuck, in his Report for 1874-5, p. 206 : ‘ It is to the extinguishing of the pauper spirit by the creation of a rightful sense of self-respect that we must look forward in all our schemes for the amelioration of the poor man’s lot. Every scheme of education which fails to keep steadily in view this especial object must, more or less, defeat itself. The education which creates or increases this principle of self-respect imparts real, vital, formative knowledge, upon which all true progress depends.’ Such teaching would alike enter into the secular and religious education ; for it is equally in accordance with the precepts and example of the great Apostle of the Gentiles, and with the first principles of political economy, as well as with the promptings of an honourable self-respect, and

of a right-minded regard for the interests of others. It is Poor Law which at present 'educates' the masses to dependence combined with perverted notions of right.

Lessons and admonitions pointing to the necessity and duty of future self-help are in fact liberally bestowed, for the most part, upon young people of the upper middle class, the class of professional men and of educated men of moderate fixed incomes. Young persons of this class are often reminded that they will have themselves only to trust to for maintenance in the social position in which they were placed by their birth, and for the attainment of the comforts to which they may reasonably aspire. And these admonitions are by no means without profit; for we daily witness instances of young men of this class who abstain from marriage till they find themselves in a position to maintain a family, who are industrious in their callings, prudent in conduct, temperate in habit, and ready to go anywhere, do anything and submit to anything consistently with honour and self-respect, in order to secure for themselves a competent or even a bare maintenance. Few of the sons of this class but act in accordance with the training to self-help which they have received. And it may be asked, Why should not the children of the artisans, mechanics, and agricultural labourers of England be taught, if not at home, yet at least in their schools, to exercise, when they become men, the same masculine and self-respecting virtues?—be taught to trust

to themselves for maintenance, and to think shame of trusting to the forced and often grudging contributions of others, or even to their voluntary alms except under the very rare pressure of unavoidable necessity? Are these classes sunk so low in pauperism as that such lessons shall be thrown away upon their children?

However, all those who gain their livelihood by the exertion of their physical faculties ought, with a view to their dispauperization, if with no other view, to be impressed, whether in youth or manhood, with the truth that it is a simple matter of honesty to practise thrift, lest they should afterwards be forced to throw themselves as a burden upon their neighbours. When some one avowed that 'somehow he could never make up his mind to be economical,' the just answer was, 'You might as well say that you never could make up your mind to be honest.'

SECTION VIII.

SELF-HELP AND VOLUNTARY RELIEF.

SUCH are the steps, and such the remedial measures accompanying them, which are suggested for the ultimate abolition of compulsory relief, that manifold 'curse' to the country, both in a social and an economic point of view, as the preceding pages have attempted to show. The abolition, thus effected, would, it is hoped, give no rude shock to our social system, or to traditional sentiments and habits. The ease with which the change was accomplished in 1834 from the most threatening excesses of the old Poor Law system to the improved regulations of the new, furnishes an encouraging precedent. In the course of a certain fixed number of years, giving full notice of the intended change, the wages-earning population will have been weaned from its baneful dependence on external aid; 'educated' in both senses of the word to rely on their own industry and thrift for provision against those 'afflictions and distresses in body and estate,' to which all mankind are liable, and from some of which none can hope to be exempted.

Few indeed are the cases in which destitution

arises from other than easily preventible causes.¹ For the relief of such cases uncompulsory charity, as in other countries, may with confidence be relied upon. There are indeed those who would question the ground of this confidence, and, in so doing, would seem to arraign the providential and natural order of things. Such persons may be left to argue their point with Professor Fawcett, who concludes in effect against the method of uncompulsory relief, in that it is indiscriminate, and is extended to the deserving and undeserving alike. If, then, it be *too* liberal, it is clear that it will be sufficient. Where destitution is not due to gross misconduct the relief of it may be safely trusted to the common feelings of humanity, especially when they are reinforced by the motives of religious charity. 'Where cases of real hardship occur,' say the Commissioners in their Report of 1834, 'the remedy must be applied by individual charity, a virtue for which no system of compulsory relief can, or ought, to be a substitute.'

The real inadequacy of the compulsive relief system is shown by the fact, that it fails at the moment when

¹ 'Wherever enquiries have been made as to the previous condition of the able-bodied individuals who live in such numbers upon the town-parishes, it has been found that the pauperism of the greater number has originated in indolence, vice, or improvidence, and might have been avoided by ordinary care and industry. The smaller number consisted of cases where the cause of pauperism could not be ascertained, rather than of cases where it was apparent that destitution had arisen from blameless want.'—*Report of Poor Law Commissioners for 1834.*

there is the greatest need. On such occasions it breaks down as regards both in-maintenance and out-relief. It is obvious that there cannot be provided a sufficient amount of accommodation in workhouses to meet extraordinary emergencies. Mr. Longley, in his Report of 1874-5 to the Local Government Board, mentions the failure of the indoor maintenance system in London, when the financial difficulties of 1866 threw a multitude of applicants upon the parish. Out-of-door relief was found equally incommensurate with the exigencies of the 'cotton famine' in 1863, in Lancashire. Then rates were raised so high that they could not be raised higher without ruin to the ratepayers, and no more aid for the destitute hand-workers could be obtained from that source. Hence it was found necessary to appeal with lamentable accounts of starving hand-workers and their families to the charity of the whole kingdom. The national bounty poured in to an amount which was not only sufficient but abundant; for, when the pressure of the famine had been relieved by it, a considerable surplus remained in the hands of the distributors. Upon this fact it may in passing be observed that, had there been no Poor Laws on which the hand-workers in question might rely in case of exigency, there would probably have been far less distress to be relieved, and that charity would have been amply competent to relieve it. We may judge, too, from this instance that charity comes out strongest when the need is greatest, and that its resources are

equal to any demand that may be made upon them. However, it is certain that, notwithstanding poor-relief, recourse was here necessarily had to charity ; and the failure of compulsory relief was conspicuous when its real efficiency was put to the test. It may well be believed that the voluntary relief given on the occasion of this Lancashire calamity was received by the distressed with a warmth of gratitude towards their wealthier and more prosperous countrymen which no amount of compulsory relief would have kindled.

All experience shows that charity influenced by religion may be trusted for the relief of distress. There are, for instance, few Jewish paupers, because their co-religionists, in obedience to the beneficent precepts, common alike to the Law and the Gospel, voluntarily assist the indigent members of their own community. The practice, as I am informed, among the Jews is to apply the alms of the congregation to the relief of its distressed members, and, where those members are capable of earning a subsistence, to such relief as may assist them in following their respective callings—in short, to ‘helping them to help themselves ;’ and it is said to be the custom with such as have prospered after receiving this relief to pay back its cost to the fund of the congregation. Among the heathens, the Parsees are conspicuous for liberality of alms to such of their co-religionists as may fall into want. Among Christian communities, it is notorious that the Society of Friends provide for

their members in distress. The liberality of almsgiving among members of the Romish communion needs but to be mentioned, and in some places their 'organisation of charity' is worthy of all praise. In a letter of Dr. Arnold's, published in his Life, is a description of one of their organised charities; it is at Padua: 'The influence of the clergy must be great there, and most beneficially exercised; for a large institution for the poor of Padua, providing for those who are out of work, as well as for the old and infirm, derives its main support from legacies; the clergy never failing to urge every man who can at all afford it, to leave something at his death for this object.' Such is the efficacy of charity prompted by religion. And in England why has not this charity its full efficacy, but that there is a system of laws which, undertaking the relief of the distressed by means of forced contributions, chills its heart and 'narrows its hand'? Where want is the result of mere idleness, the Apostolic remedy is simple: 'If a man will not work, neither shall he eat;' and the man who has been left to try this remedy will assuredly be cured of the disease! But this kind of disease will never be remedied while there are laws which propagate it. On the other hand, charity, including that 'charity which begins at home,' if there be no laws to supersede its exercise, may safely be trusted to relieve and aid all unavoidable distress. Even concurrently with the Poor Law the manifold operations

of charity are continued, and, it may be added, clashing in many cases with the administration of that law, unfortunately assist in pauperizing the masses, as those persons are aware who have set on foot the 'organisation of charity' in London.¹ Nay, under the old Poor Law, the Commissioners of 1832 could observe in their Report that 'private and uncompulsory charity is so deeply implanted by Providence in human nature, that even the existing system has rather misdirected than destroyed it.' We may therefore judge how effectually it would operate if the relief of real distress were left wholly to its agency. Even now, as Dr. Hawkesley has shown, the amount annually given in charity in London alone amounts to 5,000,000*l*.² It has, indeed, been apprehended, as we have already mentioned, that its operations would be only too extensive for the good of the recipients and the public welfare. There is, however, good reason for expecting that this superabundant beneficence would soon cure itself, and that experience would lead to the wiser direction of its copious streams, and to their retrenchment within due and prudent bounds.

Of the superiority of voluntary over compulsory

¹ The reader who wishes to form a notion of the extent and effects of private charity in the East End of London is referred to 'the Remains' of the late benevolent Mr. Edward Denison, and to the remarkable letter of the Rev. W. Stone, formerly Rector of Whitechapel, which will be found in the Report of the Poor Law Commissioners for 1834.

² Fawcett's 'Manual of Political Economy,' p. 565.

relief in the effect on the minds both of givers and recipients there can be no question. The free-will giving of relief not only expresses, but strengthens, a sympathetic interest in the welfare of the recipients, who in their turn feel, when help is given them out of kindly motives, a gratefulness which they cannot feel for help which could not have been withheld from them. Thus it establishes a relation of good-will between the two parties, to the benefit of both.

It may be objected that by the limitation of poor-relief to voluntary effort an undue strain would be exerted on the resources of the more benevolent members of the community. If, however, as is here contended, and as the great masters of political economy unanimously argue, poverty is aggravated by compulsory relief, it is reasonable to expect that through its gradual and gentle abolition the amount of poverty to be relieved would have proportionably decreased. Nor should it be forgotten that, were the relief of distress left to the exertions of the benevolent, the latent benevolence of thousands would be called forth into active operation. People's liberality will be more on the alert when, in particular cases coming under their own notice, they feel that the prevention of starvation depends on their own individual action. From these considerations it would appear that, in ordinary times, no serious addition would accrue to the calls which are now made on benevolent persons by the joint claims of compulsory and of charitable relief.

In *extraordinary* emergencies it seems to be generally admitted that compulsory relief altogether breaks down. Such, as we saw, was the case in the Lancashire 'cotton famine,' when recourse was of necessity had to the charity of the whole kingdom, which ungrudgingly poured in its millions to the timely and effectual relief of the distressed districts.

The benevolent may be trusted to bear their burden cheerfully, for cheerfulness is of the very essence of benevolence. Though it might fall heavily at first on individuals among them, the burden would soon be lightened by the probable increase of those who would aid to bear it, and the probable decrease of the distress which causes it.

In what ways voluntary charity may be made to supersede compulsory relief may be gathered from the 'Report on Foreign Poor Laws' to which reference has been made. Take the instance of France, where relief is granted by voluntary associations, called 'bureaux de bienfaisance' and 'bureaux de charité,' the difference between which it is not here necessary to explain, but which administer funds derived from old endowments and charitable collections, supplemented by 'optional and incidental' subsidies from local authorities, and sometimes from the Central Government. These voluntary associations are managed by elected and unpaid committees, subject to the inspection of public authority. They are not, indeed, universal, but they extend to two-thirds of the depart-

ments of France. The relief which they administer is wholly voluntary ; even the aid which the State gives towards their funds, and which, exclusive of Paris, amounts to about one-sixth of their income, is given as a matter of charity, not of legal obligation. To quote the Report on this point, 'the State takes its share of voluntary charity either by means of local subsidies or by special grants of public money.' Establishments for outdoor and indoor relief may be founded at the discretion of local authorities, subject to the approval of the Minister of the Interior. There are also hospitals and almshouses in various places, supported by voluntary contributions. Such is a brief account of the efficient organisation of voluntary charity in France. It may be added that there are no poor-rates, and that no one can claim relief as a matter of legal right.

In Belgium, according to Mr. Doyle,¹ there is, properly speaking, no poor-rate, the burden of supporting the poor being 'thrown upon private charity, stimulated, husbanded, and regulated by the State.' No pauper has a formal right to relief. 'In most communes sufficient funds for the support of the poor are provided by the proceeds of former endowments, aided by a constant flow of donations and bequests.' These funds are administered by boards of unpaid functionaries. In this country it appears that pauperism is increased by an 'excessive amount of assistance and alms provided by

¹ 'Introduction to Report on Poor Laws in Foreign Countries,' pp. 58-60.

public and private charity'—a fact which goes to prove that this resource is at any rate *sufficient* for the relief of real poverty.

The Grand Duchy of Luxemburg, a dependency of the crown of Holland, 'seems,' says the Report, 'to have next to no revenue for the poor; yet no complaints of dearth and distress ever come from that quarter.'¹ Here, then, it appears that voluntary alms are sufficient for the relief of distress.

'In Italy,' Mr. Doyle states in his introduction to the Report, 'speaking generally, there is no legal provision for the relief of the poor, and no special tax is levied for the purpose; and, as there is no obligation on the part of local bodies to support destitute persons, the place of birth or domicile of individual paupers is not bound to pay the expenses of their relief elsewhere. There is consequently no law of settlement.'

Customs, with regard to the relief of the poor, vary in Italy with the very heterogeneous provinces of which the Italian kingdom is composed; but it may be said generally of that kingdom that large charitable foundations and a constantly flowing stream of private alms constitute the provision made for the relief of the poor. The expenditure of private alms at Rome has been so profuse as greatly to stimulate pauperism, just as is the case in the East End of London. 'Rome,' says the Report, 'always pre-eminent in lavish almsgiving, has been always distinguished for the wide diffusion of its squalid

¹ P. 211, see also p. 207.

indigence, the magnitude of its many-sided mendicity.' This evil, however, was being remedied under the wise regulations of the Italian Government, which had already effected a retrenchment in this expenditure to the extent of about 20,000 francs = 800*l.* per month. But the province of Bologna, in that kingdom, is a most striking instance of the success of a liberal but not unwise distribution of voluntary, including endowed, relief. In that province, out of a population of 407,452, the number of persons relieved in one year was only 8,945, or a little more than two per cent. ; was, in fact, $2\frac{20889}{101863}$ per cent. of the inhabitants.

In Bavaria,¹ poor-relief is a matter, in by far the greater proportion, of highly organised voluntary charity; and the compulsory relief of proved necessity can be obtained only when relief cannot be obtained from relatives or from voluntary relief societies or establishments. Legal provision, though in a certain degree obligatory, is at the same time only subsidiary; and 'the poor have no right to prefer a claim at law before a judicial authority for public relief.'

In the rest of Germany, the methods of relief are too diverse to be easily capable of reduction under any one general category, but it may be said that for by far the greater part a highly organised voluntary relief is the rule. For accounts of this organisation in Germany the reader is referred to the 'Reports on Poor Laws in Foreign Countries,' especially to the descriptions given

¹ Pp. 376 *seqq.* 'Report on Bavaria.'

of poor-management by an extensive voluntary agency and subvission of districts in Hamburg, Leipsic, and, above all, Elberfeld in the province of Dusseldorf. The general idea of poor-relief in Germany is that of voluntary alms administered by numerous unpaid functionaries, and supplemented, when the funds fall short, by local public bodies from the proceeds of local taxation. In short, organised charity, subsidised, upon occasion, from public funds, is a general description of poor-relief in the States of Germany. It may be added that in these, as in other Continental States, great stress is effectually laid on the duty of relatives in the succour of distressed persons.

In Russia, 'no taxes are levied for the relief of the poor.'¹ In this country, organised charity, both endowed and private, with some subsidies from the State and from municipal bodies, is the general rule. In Odessa the relief of the poor is almost entirely left, and apparently with much success, to voluntary charity.

Bucharest, the capital of Wallachia, is a signal instance of the successful working of purely private charity, to judge from the following extract from the Report:² 'No doubt in Bucharest there are numerous persons who, in comparison with their neighbours, are badly off; but there is none of that squalid misery which is to be met with in the cities of Western Europe. In confirmation of this it may be

¹ 'Introduction to Report,' p. 37.

² 'Report,' pp. 480-1.

mentioned that a charitable society of ladies, established a year ago by the Princess, and of which the meetings are held under the presidency of Her Highness, has had the unusual difficulty to contend with of not finding objects on which to expend its funds. The ladies of the society undertook to ascertain personally the condition of the applicants, and in most instances discovered that they were not of a class coming within the object of the society, that of relieving pressing distress; their houses being comfortable, and sometimes with the luxury of a piano. . . .

‘The hospitals of Bucharest are numerous, and I have the authority of more than one English medical man, who has assisted them, for stating that they bear a favourable comparison with the principal hospitals of the Continent. The relief afforded is invariably gratuitous.’

Such is a brief, and necessarily, from the complexity of the subject, imperfect account of the manner in which uncompulsory charity operates in the principal States of the Continent of Europe. In these countries there appears to be no more of poverty,¹ no less of industry, and certainly more of thrift and self-restraint, than in our own population. No reason can be assigned why the compulsory method is more necessary for England than for other countries.

¹ It was stated in a former page, on the authority of Professor Fawcett, that as many persons in proportion to population die of starvation in London as in Paris or Berlin.

In comparing the two different methods, the compulsory and the voluntary, as exhibited respectively in this country and on the Continent, it may be urged that they come after all to the same thing—the relief of poverty. This may be granted; but it must be remembered that the compulsory method has a far greater effect in *creating* poverty and in demoralizing a population. Where relief is compulsory, it can be depended upon as a certainty, and thus offers a direct premium to improvidence; where it is voluntary, it can only be looked to as a possibility, and thus leaves the more occasion for the exercise of provident self-restraint. Voluntary relief, again, causes less loss of manly and honourable self-respect to the objects of it. Further, compulsory relief is contributed as a matter of course, often with grudging; where relief is voluntary, it is the exercise of a beneficent quality of humanity. On the other hand, compulsory relief is received under a false impression of right, and often with discontent at its amount; voluntary relief is received with gratitude, or at least with some due sense of obligation. Compulsory relief tends to impoverish multitudes of the payers of it; but there is no fear lest voluntary relief should exceed the proportion of the means of the givers. Again, where compulsory relief is in force, there will be voluntary relief going on at the same time; as, for instance, in London, where, according to authentic testimony, five millions are annually expended in charity; and the two kinds of relief, each by its independent

action often interfering with the other, and raising the amount of the other, must tend to increase pauperism, and must involve the unproductive consumption of an undue quantity of the capital, the wages-fund of the country. Moreover, compulsory relief must in its administration be much more liable to abuse and extravagance than the opposite kind ; for if persons are unfortunately careless in regard to the beneficial disbursement of their own means for the relief of poverty, they will be more likely to be careless in regard to the beneficial disbursement of public funds for the same purpose. Hence, altogether, the voluntary method seems far more consistent with the material, moral, and social welfare of the recipients and of the contributors also, as well as with public economy, than the compulsory method, though both methods may ‘ come to the same thing ’ in the relief of actual and present distress.

Voluntary charity may take the form either of organised charity, or of aid given by individuals to persons known to the donors. The question suggests itself, which of these two is preferable in lieu of compulsory relief ; and the decision of this question would probably depend upon the nature of the locality in which voluntary charity is to be exercised. In large cities, London especially, numbers form an obstacle almost insuperable to the due efficacy of individual charity in relief of the honestly distressed ; but in small towns and country villages it would apparently

be preferable on more than one account, especially as it would fall in more easily with English habits of action, which incline rather to individualism than to co-operation. Thus a person in possession of means would, in proportion to their extent, dispense his charities on due occasion in his own locality to a group of poorer persons, with whose circumstances he would be acquainted. In this way more of real good is done even now than in any other way, as more exactly meeting the cases of the recipients, and producing a reciprocity of good feeling between them and their benefactors. On the other hand, organised charity has a certain tendency to the indiscriminate and mechanical working of legal relief; and by its necessary publicity is more adverse to the honest self-respect of its objects than is the private aid of the individual benefactor.

Doubtless, in the absence of legal relief, there would be a call on the more prosperous portion of the community to give increased attention to the condition of the less prosperous. They would be under the necessity of diverting an occasional hour or two from business or pleasure to this object, as guardians of the poor are in this country, and as the numerous volunteer inspectors are on the Continent—at Elberfeld, Leipsic, and elsewhere; to say nothing of the unpaid managers of the ‘bureaux de bienfaisance’ and of the ‘bureaux de charité’ in France. But by this increased attention to the circumstances of the poorer portion of the community they would be rendering a great ser-

vice to the public, and ultimately to their own interests. They would be aiding to fill up that chasm of alienation between classes, the widening of which is one of our social dangers. For it is upon a good understanding between different classes, not upon a police force, that public safety ultimately depends ; and to bring about such an understanding nothing would more powerfully tend than that practical interest on the part of the richer towards the less prosperous class, and that increased intercourse between them, which may be expected to supervene upon the substitution of voluntary beneficence for a legal compulsion upon the former to supply the necessities, however incurred, of the latter portion of the community.

A demur to this expectation may be made by shrewd and cynical judges of their species ; but a larger-minded and more generous view of humanity appears to be the sounder philosophy. A return to the natural order of things, by which each man's temporal welfare is in his own hands, aided in case of misfortune by the benevolent action of his more fortunate fellows, would, it is suggested, turn the heart of the rich still more towards the poor, and the heart of the poor towards the rich. A return to this order of things would beneficially give room to the free play of human sympathies, overleaping the barriers of class to the common benefit of all. The aid which is now compelled would be given with good-will and received with gratitude ; and the social bond be strengthened.

Extraordinary occasions, indeed, in the history of nations, such as war, pestilence, or famine, involving in one net of suffering the provident and the improvident alike, may occur to render necessary the temporary intervention of law enforcing relief, as violent disorders of the human body require unusual remedies. But to make compulsory relief the constant resource of real or apparent, of unavoidable or factitious, poverty, is like the habitual use of medical appliances in a state of ordinary health.

In ordinary times, however, it is strange that our philanthropists and the earnest friends of the wages-earning population should not be more alive to the impoverishing and demoralizing, the really cruel, effects, in the long run, of compulsory relief, which in great measure defeat all benevolent plans for the benefit of those classes. It is strange that they have not realised the fact that their multifarious efforts of benevolence in present circumstances can only stop a few holes in the sieve through which so much of the happiness and virtue of those classes runs away and is lost ; nay, that these efforts, combined with the operation of the Poor Laws, have the effect in many places of increasing the bulk of pauperism, by multiplying its resources, and often even counteract the effects of a judicious administration of those laws. Still stranger that some of the ' friends ' of those classes should still defend a system which all the varied and disastrous experience of the last eighty years has shown to be fraught with mis

chief in creating wretchedness and encouraging vice. So far from depreciating the efforts of well-directed voluntary charity, we have asserted that these are the natural and appointed means for all that is practicable in preventing and relieving poverty. But we will also assert that, if the above reasoning be correct, all the efforts of voluntary charity, while the system of legal relief coexists with it, will be upon the whole not merely vain in raising the material condition of the wages-earning classes, but often worse than vain. Even the efforts which are being made for improving the moral and religious condition of those classes must be powerfully counteracted by the operation of laws which remove the great secondary deterrents from improvidence, intemperance, and immorality, and which encourage the neglect of natural and social duties; like as the work of missionaries in a heathen country is impeded by the scandalising influence which their 'civilised' compatriots often exert upon the native mind. The difficulty of raising the moral standard in a population must be greater in proportion as a law prevails which tends to lower it. While our Poor Law remains, one prolific root, not only of material, but also of moral, mischief remains, which will continue to throw up its noxious produce, blasting the hopes of improvement and checking the growth of all wholesome sentiments. How to extirpate it is the problem not merely for politicians but for philanthropists to solve; how to extinguish a system which proposes to

abolish poverty by means which immeasurably increase it, and bring in other and worse evils.

If the above statements and arguments are correct, it is no dream of enthusiasm but a conviction of sober sense to believe that could a man spend the united fortunes of the Grosvenors, the Gowers, the Rothschilds, all the wealth stored or represented in the Bank of England and in Lombard Street, in attempts to ameliorate the condition of the masses, and were he to pass all his days in the best-directed application of these means to this object, he would accomplish but an infinitesimal amount of the benefit which that man would accomplish who should bring the intelligence of the community to recognise the genuine philanthropy of a gradual abolition of the Poor Law system; a system which, interfering with the natural and providential order of things in the constitution of human society, indefinitely increases the evil which it proposes to remedy, and depraves while it impoverishes those whom it was intended to benefit.

The first efforts at impressing this view, fortified though it be by the authority of the most masculine minds that have searched into the causes of national well-being, may be met with opposition or the still more adverse conspiracy of silence; but the earnest repetition of such efforts must at length prevail in proportion to their wise and beneficent tendency.

To demonstrate the evils of the Poor Law in its economic aspects, and the consequent advantage to the

community which might be expected from the abolition of that law, would offer a worthy field for the patriotic exertions and homely eloquence of a second Cobden.

Meantime, a hopeful augury of an effective 'Anti-Poor Law' movement is given in the numerous Poor Law Conferences now annually held in different districts of the kingdom for the discussion of questions relating to the provisions, administration, and effects of this law. Important also in their similar significance are the following facts: that one of the Parliamentary representatives of the wages-earning classes themselves has exhorted his compeers in industry 'to trust not to the Poor Law, but to themselves;' and has said, 'By all means make the people hate the Poor Law, but do so not by declaiming against it, but by teaching them a manly independence;' that one of the principal spokesmen of the Labourers' Union declared at one of its great meetings, 'The Poor Law is the great curse of the country;' and that at another of these meetings Professor Francis Newman came forward, and, after describing pauperism as 'the maintenance of a large body of the community upon public alms, and as a *disease* which ought not to continue in a healthy country,' proceeded to observe, that 'some people thought the Poor Law a natural state of things, and one made out of compassion for the labourer; it was no such thing; it was made as a police provision.'¹ As

¹ See Report of Labourers' Meeting at Exeter, in the 'Times' of October 21, 1874; and at Wellington, in the 'Times' of October 22, 1874.

a police provision! Truly, the Poor Law—at least the disastrous Act of 1796, passed under a double panic, and probably also the beginning of the evils, the legislation of Elizabeth—was dictated by notions of policy. The dangerous tendency of aggregated poverty has indeed been the primary cause of Poor Laws. They owe their immediate origin to the craft of statesmen and the fears of the community. They resemble the expedient of buying off invaders, who yet will return with heavier demands. Established to meet a temporary emergency, they have proved a permanent mischief in infringing upon the national wealth, pauperizing and demoralizing millions in every successive age, and creating a chronic state of discontent among them, which may at any time burst forth, so as to endanger public safety and the existing order of things. These laws, it has been truly observed, are designed to ‘afford a protection to realised wealth, at the expense of much that is noble and humane.’ They are a notable instance of the propensity of legislators to stave off till succeeding times (*après moi le déluge*) the difficulties of their own times, and to leave posterity to cope with those difficulties in an aggravated form. To the same policy of fear, combined with the superinduced force of custom, these laws owe their continuance.

If, however, the Poor Law be, as these champions of the Agricultural Labourers’ Union thus boldly declare it to be, ‘the great curse of the country,’ ‘a

disease,' 'an unnatural state of things,' who can estimate the good which, other circumstances favouring, must accrue from its abolition to those very classes for whose supposed benefit it is continued in operation? Surely it is one of the most melancholy exhibitions in the world, that of the wages-earning classes of England, with all their good and solid qualities, subjected to the impoverishing, demoralizing, often brutalising influences of Poor Law administration. An encouraging fact, illustrative of the beneficial effect, if not of the abolition, yet of the 'minimisation,' of the compulsory system, is furnished by the contemporary history of Poor Law reformation in Norway. In the 'Report on Foreign Poor Laws,'¹ we are informed that in 1845 a law was passed in that country 'giving to every person in case of destitution a legal claim to relief.' The effect of this law was such as might, from our own experience, have been expected. 'The burdens of the wealthier classes were increased, while the motives to self-dependence in the poor were weakened.' During fifteen years, while this law was in operation, pauperism increased one-third, and the expenditure was nearly doubled, although the population had increased only one-fifth. The Government, however, sensible of these evil results of the law of 1845, totally changed the system in 1863. The 'right' to relief was restricted to orphans and persons of unsound mind. The relief even of the sick and aged ceased to be obligatory; and

¹ P. 23 of the 'Introduction to Report on Foreign Poor Laws.'

able-bodied men were to be relieved only upon the Commissioners being satisfied that the cases were of 'urgent necessity.' The consequences of this change of law in Norway were speedily apparent. In 1869, six years after the change was effected, 'pauperism was only about 180,000 out of a population of 1,720,500, or about $10\frac{1}{2}$ to every thousand, while the whole expenditure was 250,700*l*.' A new system of Poor Law, which in six years produced an effect like this towards dispauperizing a population, is well entitled to the description, given of it in the Report, of 'an improved system.'

It has been observed, with a melancholy approach to truth, that a public improvement usually comes too late ; for that, while it is being effected, there spring up other evils than those against which it is directed. But what of this? Is it that no improvements should be even attempted? Nay, this would be to contradict our best instincts and to paralyse benevolent efforts, even to ignore the benevolence of Providence in the ordering of human affairs by human means. Surely hopefulness is the better philosophy ; and it is the truest wisdom to aim at bettering the condition of our fellows, while the results are left in faith to a higher Hand.

Without, therefore, indulging in any Utopian anticipations of social and economic perfection to be wrought amongst ourselves by the gradual and ultimate abolition of the noxious system in question, or drawing too bright a picture of the England of the

future, we may at least encourage the modest hope that the change will be prospered to the benefit of the community, and that the morality, the temperance, the regard for the rights and interests of others, the sense of domestic and of relative duty, the frugal and provident virtues on the part of the wages-earning population, will be greatly promoted ; that these classes will take their proper social position as independent sellers of skilled work and labour to independent buyers at a price coming up more nearly to the natural value of those commodities than is possible to be maintained so long as that price is weighed down by Poor Law taxation ; and that in default of ability to sell that work and labour, a very unusual case in the usual course of things, or failing the ability to work through sickness, accident, or old age, they will ordinarily support themselves by their own provident savings ; or in exceptional cases will be supported by the help of more prosperous relatives ; or, in the last resort, by eleemosynary benefaction, whether in the form of individual or organised charity.

The honest and manly independence of self-help will replace both the abject dependence on the law-enforced help of others, and the false and defiant independence based on the knowledge that such help can always be demanded, even at self-incurred need.

With self-help will come a higher self-respect, showing itself in improved habits of life. The produce of prudent economy will bring an increase of solid

comfort to the homes of the wages-earners, weakening the attractions of alehouses and ginshops.

Improved habits of life will be attended by a proportionate diminution of the ill-health and disease which prevail in our cities and large towns. Ragged clothing and squalid dwellings will be less often seen in our streets and villages. Instead of mere '*labourers*,' and '*hands*,' so called, there will be 'the peasantry,' 'the cottagers,' 'the artisans,' and 'mechanics' of England; and, instead of pauperized masses, an honest and manly population, depending for support on their own exertions under the blessing of Providence, and resorting to the benevolence of the more prosperous, only under the pressure of a rare necessity, bringing with it no loss of self-respect. Thus a long course of erroneous legislation will have been retraced, a vast amount of moral energy called into activity, and the Dispauperization of England accomplished.

Like disease and other ills to which flesh is heir, poverty cannot be prevented or abolished by any human contrivance. The outcome of men's self-interests, passions, vices, and follies working conflictingly and confusedly in society, it will continue to be thrown up by that 'boiling sea' while human nature continues to be what it is. Meanwhile, as experience seems to show, the only chance of the 'minimisation' and mitigation of poverty lies in self-help, supplemented, whenever that may fail, by benevolence.

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